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COLERIDGE

BY

RICHARD GARNETT

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S. T. COLERIDGE (*circa* 1812).

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RICHARD GARNETT, C.B. LL.D.

LONDON
GEORGE BELL & SONS
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COLERIDGE

PERSONAL HISTORY

WORDSWORTH, writing to Daniel Stuart after Coleridge's death, says, "Coleridge is a subject which no biographer ought to touch beyond what he himself was eye-witness of." If this is to be taken literally, many have laboured in vain! It may be hoped, however, that Wordsworth intended his remarks solely for the benefit of contemporaries; at all events the biographers have now come in like a flood, and it is too late to lift up a banner against them. It must, nevertheless, be admitted that in treating of Coleridge's life it is easier to be interesting than absolutely authentic. The bare external facts are well ascertained, but their significance chiefly consists in their relation to a spiritual history which, from the nature of the case, can be but imperfectly detailed, and which must remain obscure in many particulars. Psychologically, Coleridge is one of the most interesting personages ever submitted to human contemplation, and it is impossible to avoid continual reference to the workings of his mind while relating the events of his life. In this abridged sketch, nevertheless, our

concern is rather with the indispensable groundwork of facts than with the edifice which it may be possible to rear upon them. The obvious difficulty arising from the "myriad-mindedness" of the man, and his twofold eminence as poet and thinker, could be surmounted only by another Coleridge.

An affinity may often be remarked or fancied between the native districts of illustrious men and the characteristics of their own genius and moral nature. The soft luxuriance of South Devon fitted Coleridge no less admirably than the "land of brown heath and shaggy wood" fitted Walter Scott, or than the dales and crags of Cumberland imaged the nature of Wordsworth. He was born at Ottery St. Mary, on October 21st, 1772. The family, so far as known, was purely Devonian; the grandfather, a wool-dealer at South Molton, had failed in business; his son, sent to Cambridge by friends, had risen to be Vicar of Ottery and master of the grammar school. Most of Coleridge's characteristics seem foreshadowed in this parent—erudite, dreamy, eccentric, inoffensive, affectionate, and so unambitious that he would have allowed all his sons except Samuel to be brought up to trades but for the interposition of his wife—a sensible, resolute, practical woman, but one whose interests were bounded by the horizon of daily life.

About Samuel, however, there must have been from the first something suggestive of Lamb's observation that his mouth was never opened but to preach; for his father, convinced that

the boy was destined "to wag his pow in a pulpit," made him his special companion, talked to him in a manner adapted to open his mind, and encouraged indiscriminate reading. The result was a dreamy and sequestered childhood, passed with imagination and old romance, and happy but for the persecutions of uncongenial comrades at the dame school, until the sudden death of the father, in 1781, led to the boy's transference to the Blue Coat School at Christ's Hospital in the following year. Here he seems to have remained until 1789, without once coming home, and, though occasionally swerving from the even tenor of his way by professing to turn atheist, desiring to be articled to a cobbler, and drying his clothes on his back after a swim in the New River, to have been reasonably happy, notwithstanding poor fare and the other discomforts incident to boarding-school life in those days, including an illness which he attributed to this New River adventure, and the amenities of a flagellating master.

The plagose Boyer was nevertheless a good scholar, his pupil became a Grecian, and in January, 1791, received an Exhibition at Jesus College, Cambridge. The Church was then his destined profession, for the superior chance of ecclesiastical preferment at Jesus was assigned as the reason for the selection of that college. The authorities evidently thought well of him. Among his intimate friends at school had been Charles Lamb, Thomas Fanshawe Middleton, afterwards the first Bishop of Calcutta, and

Charles Valentine Le Grice, afterwards a Cornish clergyman, a man of much wit and talent, but whose name is solely preserved by his Christ's Hospital friendships, which endured through life. Coleridge also formed an intimacy with the Evans family, destined to influence his life through the medium of their daughter Mary, his first and perhaps only real love.

Coleridge's career at Cambridge began well; he gained the Browne gold medal for a Greek ode on the slave trade, and in a competition for the Craven scholarship was second only to so formidable a competitor as Samuel Butler, the future head master of Shrewsbury and Bishop of Lichfield. But the time was one of intense political excitement, the early days of the French Revolution. The more promising young men usually espoused the opposite side to that of their pastors and masters, and Coleridge, who had adopted republican opinions, did not commend himself to the authorities by assembling undergraduates at his rooms to hear his harangues and his readings from political pamphlets, or by his conspicuous sympathy with William Frend, the eccentric fellow of his own college, enemy of Newton and Athanasius both, who was in 1793 banished from the university, though not deprived of his fellowship, for writing an obnoxious tract. Coleridge, who in quieter times might have given his whole mind to the attainment of university distinction, was thus alienated from the regular studies of the place: he also carried with him the burden of an unspoken

attachment to Mary Evans, the more hopeless from his chronic condition of indebtedness, not necessarily discreditable to a young man of free and generous disposition, endeavouring to live at college on slender means.

After an unsuccessful attempt to retrieve his fortunes by a venture in the Irish lottery, he took the desperate step of enlisting in the dragoons, under the assumed name of Silas Tomkyn Comberbacke, as near an approach as he could venture to the Cumberback which he foresaw himself destined to be. A worse horseman never disgraced a cavalry regiment: but the authorities were humorists too, and, finding that they could make nothing of him as a soldier, assigned him the less glorious but more perilous vocation of nursing a comrade with small pox. Coleridge communicated indirectly with his family, his brothers purchased his discharge, and by April, 1794, he was receiving the admonitions of another set of authorities, those of his own college, who passed his escapade over very leniently. He resumed his studies, but he had destroyed all prospect of university honours or emoluments by becoming not only a Republican but also a Unitarian. It is not surprising that his next move should have been towards independence from all restraint, although the particular direction it assumed was largely determined by accident.

Among Coleridge's friends at Christ Church had been Robert Allen, afterwards a surgeon in the army. Allen was at this time a student at

Oxford, where Coleridge visited him in July, 1794, and there became acquainted with the remarkable person who might be described as his good and evil genius, so great were the services he rendered him and so great the mischief that, with the best intentions, he did him; so ardent was his friendship at one period and so frigid his indifference at another. Robert Southey was throughout his life a fanatic of a noble and high-minded type, a disinterested champion of the ideas in which he believed for the time being, but dogmatic and disdainful, even to offensiveness, in his carriage towards those who had the misfortune to disagree with him. He was then in the St. Just stage of his development, an ardent republican and free-thinker, with an austere morality and inflexible strictness of principle inconvenient to mortals moulded of Coleridge's more plastic clay. He had been expelled from Westminster for an honourable protest against flogging, and felt under no obligation to the Oxford of his day, which had admonished him by the voice of his tutor: "Mr. Southey, you will not learn anything by my lectures; so, if you have any studies of your own, you had better pursue them."

The collision of two such disaffected geniuses as he and Coleridge (both afterwards no less remarkable for their perfect contentment with Church and State as these were before the Emancipation Act) could not but engender something extraordinary. The offspring was Pantisocracy, the scheme of an ideal commonwealth

to be established by them and other like-minded youths upon the banks of the Susquehanna, with the assistance of certain young ladies as yet existing solely as visions, but to be corporally manifested in due season. If Coleridge laid the egg of Pantisocracy, he left it to be hatched by the more earnest and practical Southey, and went off on a Welsh tour. Returning in August, he looked in upon Southey at Bristol, and found that Pantisocracy was fully alive upon paper, the details having been worked out by Southey and another Oxonian, George Burnett, a simple Somersetshire youth, whose part must have been to ejaculate ditto to Mr. Burke.

From this period we begin to learn much about Coleridge from the observation of intelligent acquaintances whose reminiscences have been transmitted to us, and first and foremost from Thomas Poole, of Nether Stowey, and his circle. Coleridge, returning from his tour in Wales, seems to have remained with Southey in Bristol for about four weeks. Robespierre had just fallen, and the friends, at first with the co-operation of a youthful Quaker enthusiast, Robert Lovell, speedily dismounted from his Pegasus, produced a tragedy on the event, published at Cambridge in October by the sturdy Radical printer, Benjamin Flower, with Coleridge's name only, though Southey had written two acts to his one. This mere improvise did not interfere with their zealous propagation of the principles of "pantisocracy" and "aspheterism," terms expounded by Southey as denoting "the equal government

of all" and "the generalization of individual property." Thomas Poole, head of a tanning establishment at Nether Stowey, a village in the romantic Quantock hills, had already a local reputation as an advanced liberal thinker, and perhaps was known to have thought seriously of emigration to America.

Coleridge and Southey, questing for proselytes, found their way to Stowey as early as August 18, and there came under the scrutiny of an unfriendly observer, Poole's cousin John, whose detestation of their principles could only be adequately expressed in Latin. Thomas Poole, the model then as ever of a frank, manly, public-spirited Englishman, having, as his cousin Charlotte records, "imbibed some of the wild notions of liberty and equality that at present prevail so much," was more sympathetic than his clerical kinsman, but feared that, "however perfectible human nature might be, it was not yet perfect enough for pantisocracy." One proof of good sense the projectors had certainly given: "The regulations relating to the females strike them as the most difficult." They had further condescended to admit that "the rules" on this and other points "must in some measure be regulated by the law of the state which includes the district in which they settle." In "Coldridge," as he at first persistently calls him, Poole discerned the glory and no less the infirmities of genius. "As generally happens to men of his class, he feels the justice of Providence in the want of those inferior abilities which are necessary

to the rational discharge of the common duties of life."

This was written after only a few hours spent in Coleridge's society. Southey, he says, is "without the splendid abilities of Coldridge, though possessing much information, particularly metaphysical, and is more violent in his principles than even Coldridge himself." "Particularly metaphysical" is pregnant with matter for speculation. Southey had assuredly no turn for philosophy, but if he thought he had, and discoursed accordingly, he may well have given the receptive and more richly endowed Coleridge the bias towards metaphysical research which, for good or evil, so largely coloured his life. He also claims, and probably with justice, to have done much to elevate and purify Coleridge's ordinary standard of conduct. Considering Coleridge's temperament, it is really surprising how little irregularity can be charged against him, and he may well have been influenced by the admonitions of the austere and vehement Southey, starting from premises admitted by both.[1] The claim has almost escaped attention, being preferred in a letter printed in the dullest of voluminous biographies, Everett's "Life of James Montgomery."

[1] The contrast between the pair is graphically portrayed in Cottle's summary of one of their conversations: "Mr. Southey reminded him that unless he was determined punctually to fulfil his voluntary engagement, he ought not to have entered upon it. Mr. Coleridge thought the delay of the lecture of little or no consequence."

It is hard to single out any of Coleridge's "aberrations from prudence," as he euphemistically termed his escapades, as especially and preeminently foolish, but he was now committing the most deplorable. This was his hasty engagement to Sarah Fricker, following suit after Lovell, who had married one of the bride's sisters, and Southey, who had engaged himself to another. The father had failed in business, the eldest sister, Lovell's wife, had been on the stage, and the two younger were honourably supporting themselves as dressmakers. Had the betrothal been merely imprudent in a worldly point of view there would have been no room for serious censure, but Coleridge committed the inexpiable fault of contracting himself without making sure of the reality of his attachment, which in truth had no reality. The only excuse that can be urged for him is that his heart, as so frequently the case, had been taken at the rebound: a casual encounter with Mary Evans in Wales had revived his passion for her and convinced him of its hopelessness.

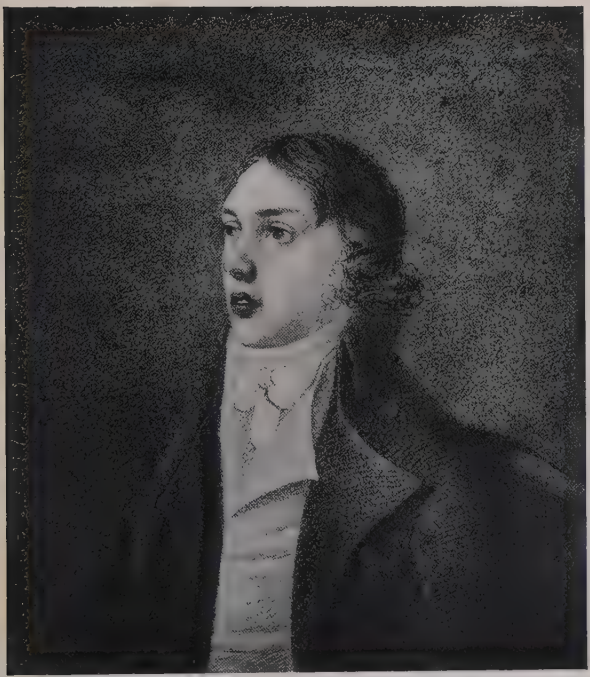
Sarah Fricker appears to have been a woman of good understanding, proficient in several accomplishments, and well fitted to tread the ordinary path of life, but incapable of comprehending that some paths might be exceptional, and that virtues transcending the merely domestic might reasonably be expected from the wife of a poet. How little, the first emotion spent, Coleridge's heart was interested is evinced by his long absence without communication with his betrothed, by a

desponding sonnet penned within two months of his engagement, and by a final effort, pathetic and not undignified, to assure himself of the exact state of the case as regarded Mary Evans, who was irrevocably pledged to another.

From September to December he was at Cambridge, which he quitted without taking a degree, though the indulgent authorities kept his name for some time upon the books. Instead of flying to his betrothed at Bristol, he repaired to London, "beguiling the cares of life with poesy" in Charles Lamb's company at the "Salutation and Cat," until Southey came to look for him and carried him off. Southey himself had in the interim been ejected and disinherited by his anti-Jacobin and monocratic aunt, and the financial prospect appeared blank in the extreme, until a Bristol publisher, Joseph Cottle, a Philistine and a poetaster, but able to discern in others the genius lacking to himself, came to the rescue by offering Southey fifty guineas in advance for his unfinished "Joan of Arc," and Coleridge thirty guineas for his poems, the most important of which, "Religious Musings," was then progressing at the average rate of a line a day. Coleridge displayed more energy in the courses of political and theological lectures he delivered during the spring and summer, which, spirited, witty, and cogent, obtained great success among sympathizers with their principles. They could not, however, keep the Bristol lodgings going, much less equip a pantisocratic settlement. Another settlement had to be made or relinquished.

On October 4th Coleridge was united to Sarah Fricker, without doubt under pressure from Southey, who little foresaw that the result would be that he would have to keep Coleridge's family as well as his own. Coleridge's honour was saved, but his life was blighted. He made, it must be said, the best of the situation, and for a time all seemed to go well: but he must have felt bitter humiliation. Resentment combined with a pecuniary disappointment to prompt a tremendous objurgation addressed to Southey in the following November for going to Lisbon, and thus, said Coleridge, betraying the sacred cause of Pantisocracy, which both knew to have been long extinct. This idle attempt to rehabilitate himself in his own good opinion at his Mentor's expense led to an interruption of their friendship until Southey's return, when, as Cottle beautifully expresses it, "the relentings of nature threw them silently into each other's arms." But they never walked arm in arm again, except once when they walked with the Devil! The beautiful passage on parted friendship in the second part of Christabel probably alludes to this estrangement.

Coleridge's fame had hitherto been merely local, his arena was now to be widened. The charm of his conversation had interested many, and his friends at Bristol—whither he had returned after an unsuccessful essay at love in a cottage at Clevedon—met one December evening at "The Rummer" and resolved to aid him to start a periodical, to be published every eighth day to avoid the stamp duty, and entitled "The



Walker & Cockerell photo.] [*National Portrait Gallery.*

S. T. COLERIDGE AT THE AGE OF 24.

By Robert Hancock.

"The dress is precisely that which Mr. Coleridge wore when he preached his first sermon in Mr. Jardine's chapel at Bath."

Watchman." Coleridge himself started on a tour to the midland and northern counties to procure subscribers, and between his persuasive eloquence and the advertisement he obtained by preaching in every Unitarian chapel on the road, got nearly a thousand. The journal appeared in March, but reflecting no one's opinions except the author's, pleased no one else. If Coleridge conciliated any sect or party in one number he affronted it in the next, and only ten numbers appeared. Some friends, instigated by the ever-thoughtful Poole, made up the loss by a subscription, intended to have been the foundation of an annuity. Before this, "Religious Musings," with some companion poems, had appeared, and was pronounced to have attained "the top scale of sublimity."

All sorts of schemes for Coleridge's benefit continued to be tried during the summer of 1796, but came to nothing, until in September he accepted the proposal of Charles Lloyd, the culture-loving son of a Birmingham banker, whose acquaintance he had made in his January tour, to board with him for the sake of his instructions. Lloyd was an interesting and amiable person, but with an unhappy predisposition to insanity, foreshadowed by epileptic fits. Coleridge returned with him to Bristol to find that he was already a father, his son Hartley having been born on September 19th. In December he removed to the cottage at Nether Stowey which he has made so celebrated, a step which seems to have been chiefly dictated by the hope of partly supporting

his family by gardening. It was wise as making him the neighbour of Thomas Poole, but injudicious inasmuch as it estranged him from the intellectual resources of Bristol. Poole had proposed it upon the first ground, and recanted upon the second, thereby working Coleridge up to a degree of agitation which might have been deemed incredible were it not attested by his own letter. In November he had, under the strong compulsion of neuralgia, taken the first dose of the laudanum which was so nearly to destroy him.

The next years, 1797 and 1798, were Coleridge's *anni mirabiles*, in which he shone with a poetic splendour of which nothing that he had previously achieved had afforded promise, and which, except by fitful flashes, he was unable to maintain. His early poems had been well received, and were this year republished, along with others by Lamb and Lloyd. Their merit was not inconsiderable, yet, as Mr. Dykes Campbell says, "Nothing in the volume gives the least hint that Coleridge's hand was already on the latch of the magic casements which were to open on the perilous seas sailed by the 'Ancient Mariner' and the fairy lands of 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan.'" These new worlds were without doubt disclosed to him through the intimate acquaintance he made in June with Wordsworth and his sister, just settled at Racedown in Dorsetshire, not far from Nether Stowey. In William he for the first time met a great poet, and what he needed still more, a poetic legis-

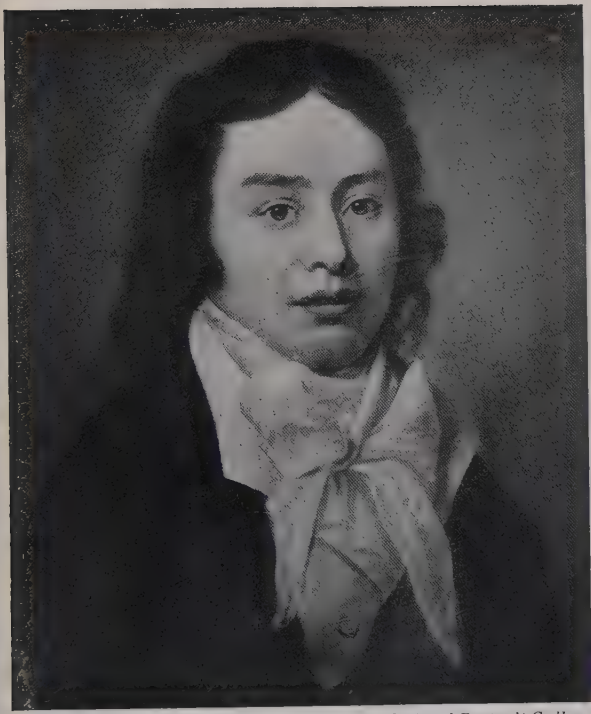
lator. In Dorothy he found what he needed most of all, a being inspired with pure and perfect sympathy. All the eighteenth century conventions which had hitherto trammelled him disappeared, and the poet of "Religious Musings" became the poet of "The Ancient Mariner." The haughty and self-sufficing Wordsworth was not likely to be influenced by his new friend in the same degree, but long afterwards he declared that, whereas he had known many great men and many extraordinary men, he had known but one wonderful man, and he was Coleridge. Dorothy uses the same expression after their first acquaintance: to hear Coleridge talk for five minutes is to become blind to every blemish and captive to an irresistible fascination.

In August the Wordsworths took Alfoxden, a house near Nether Stowey, their chief inducement Coleridge's society. They were, said Coleridge, three people but one soul; had he been free he and Dorothy would doubtless have become one flesh. At this time, however, his relations with his wife, described by a visitor as "sensible, affable, and good natured," were still affectionate, but his time was devoted to Wordsworth, with whom he undertook in November the pedestrian excursion which produced the "Ancient Mariner." It was to have been a joint composition, but Wordsworth's imagination, though equally potent, required a less rarefied atmosphere. The notion of a division of labour, Wordsworth uplifting earth to heaven, and Coleridge bringing down heaven to earth, seems to

have existed only in a fanciful retrospect. Coleridge refers the first part of "Christabel" to about this date, but passages in Dorothy Wordsworth's diary leave little doubt that it was composed in or near the following March, at which time the last touches were put to the "Mariner."

Ere this important event had taken place, Charles Lloyd's residence with Coleridge, and consequently his payments, had come to an end about the middle of 1797. Coleridge, driven to desperation by his family cares, showed unwonted resolution by proposing to sacrifice his West Country associations and fill the Unitarian pulpit at Shrewsbury. He actually proceeded thither as a candidate, preached a sermon, in which one of his auditors, the youthful Hazlitt, seemed to hear "the music of the spheres," and bid fair to obtain the appointment, when the brothers Wedgwood stepped in, and by settling an annuity of £150 upon him appeared to remove every obstacle from his path. It provided for the present funds for an expedition to Germany, which he undertook together with the Wordsworths, in September of this year. The future poetical representative of Conservatism had been turned out of Alfoxden for republicanism, and acted on the precept, "When they persecute you in one city, flee unto another."

Coleridge would have done more wisely to remain in England and avail himself of the offer of Daniel Stuart to write for the "Morning Post," which he nearly lost by irresolute procrastination. He doubtless, however, thought that the



Walker & Cockerell photo.] [*National Portrait Gallery.*

S. T. COLERIDGE IN 1795.

By Peter Vandyke.

Painted for Joseph Cottle of Bristol.

visit would aid him to fulfil the expectations of the Wedgwoods, who looked for philosophy rather than poetry at his hands, and Wordsworth desired to add scientific knowledge of nature to poetic insight. In the summer had occurred a quarrel with Charles Lloyd, involving a more painful but happily only temporary breach with Lamb. The spring had seen the production of the first part of "Christabel," "The Nightingale" and "Kubla Khan," and arrangements with Wordsworth for the joint, though anonymous, publication of "Lyrical Ballads," which appeared a few days before the departure for Germany. The new era in English poetry may be dated from the publication of this volume, which Mrs. Coleridge assured the absent authors "was not liked by any." Wordsworth's contributions give the tone to it, and have exercised more influence than his colleague's, but belong to a less exalted region of poetry than Coleridge's pair of marvels, "The Ancient Mariner" and "The Nightingale."

The visit to Germany did little for Wordsworth but much for Coleridge, whose philosophical notions, though merely anticipating a change which his poetical temperament must have effected sooner or later, it revolutionized as completely as acquaintance with Wordsworth had revolutionized his principles of poetry. The gain was not unmixed, but undoubtedly he became a richer, deeper, and more original thinker than if he had never learned from the Germans the distinction between the reason and the understanding. Plato

now took Hartley's place in his mind, and he ceased to be a Necessarian. His time was chiefly spent at Göttingen and Ratzeburg. The University lectures, especially Blumenbach's, account for his residence at the former place; but it is surprising that he did not visit Goethe and Schiller. Had he done so, important results must have ensued; had he resided for some time at Weimar he might have been completely what he is imperfectly, the intellectual mediator between Germany and England. He nevertheless felt able to say, "In Germany I made the best use of my time and means, and there is therefore no period of my life on which I look back with such unmingled satisfaction."

He returned in July, bringing with him materials for a life of Lessing, which he never wrote, and a knowledge of German which enabled him to make his wonderful translation of Wallenstein in the following January. At this time he was living in London, writing for Daniel Stuart's paper, "The Morning Post," but, though no inefficient journalist when he would exert himself, he could not be relied upon for the production of daily copy, and the connection, though intermittently continued till the "Post" passed out of Stuart's hands, practically died away. The paper was nevertheless greatly profited by his "Devil's Walk" (originally called his "Thoughts"), which he had written in the country in conjunction with Southey, his part being much the more important. He had further visited his relatives in Devonshire, and made temporary peace with them.

Compliance with Stuart's reasonable requisitions would have been anchor and ballast to Coleridge, and would have left him ample time for higher things. He remained for a time in London, talking brilliantly, but doing nothing; next sought, somewhat half-heartedly, for a settlement at Stowey, and not finding, or not choosing to find a house, migrated to the Lake district, where the Wordsworths were already installed. Considering all that he and they had been to each other, the step was most natural, and is no way blameworthy, but it proved most unfortunate. The North did not agree with him. Impaired health incapacitated him more than ever for work, and worse, induced the habit of opium taking, with which he had dallied already. The intellectual serenity and sense of intellectual elevation induced by the drug in its early stages, so eloquently described by its other illustrious victim, De Quincey, would also have their influence, resisted, unfortunately, by no counter-influence in the home circle.

Mrs. Coleridge was a good woman, but deficient in intellectual sympathy: she saw no reason why her husband should not be as strenuously industrious as her brother-in-law, and when he disappointed her, her sole resource was to scold. Coleridge's mind, moreover, had vastly developed by natural process and under the stimulus of the Wordsworths, and the semblance of intellectual companionship which had existed in 1794 was possible no longer. Domestic jars became habitual, and although a son, the excel-

lent Derwent, was born in 1800, and a daughter, the gifted Sara, in 1802, by the end of 1803 estrangement amounted to virtual separation. It was then apparent how much dis-service the well-intentioned Southey had done both parties. Had not Coleridge married Sarah Fricker he would have married Dorothy Wordsworth, with like consequences to those which Jane Welsh truly affirmed would have ensued if she had not been prevented by similar obstacles from silencing "the tongues" by espousing Edward Irving.[1]

We have anticipated, but in truth, though abundance of insignificant circumstances remain on record, little of moment can be told of Coleridge's life between his removal to Greta Hall and his departure for Malta. It was a period of intellectual activity, but its performance may be almost summed up in a single phrase, castle-building. The aerial structures were commonly metaphysical. "He talked in the course of one hour," says Davy, "of beginning three works." The intended title of one of these comprises thirty-three words, and is all of it that ever existed. In poetry he produced the far inferior, though still lovely, second part of "Christabel," the pathetic and impassioned "Ode on Dejection" (1802), his last effort in the grand style of

[1] Vindicating Nelson in a letter (October, 1814), he says, "Sir A. Ball told me of his own personal knowledge Lady Nelson was enough to drive any man wild. She had no sympathy with his acute sensibilities, and his alienation was effected before he knew Lady Hamilton by being heart-starved." One thinks of Shelley's "Who in another's woe now wept his own."

lyric poetry, and other poems of great beauty, the "Ode to Tranquillity," "The Pains of Sleep," "The Picture," and "Mont Blanc," the latter partly appropriated from a German poetess. Visits to Stowey and London, and tours in Wales and Scotland diversify the chronicle of this dreary time. At length he could bear domestic infelicity no more, and on the alleged ground of ill health, partly cause and partly effect of his now habitual indulgence in opium, in April, 1804, sailed for Malta, leaving Mrs. Coleridge and his children in the charge of the Southeys, who had come to live at Greta Hall, and making over to her, to his honour be it remembered, the whole of the annuity received from the Wedgwoods. The expenses of the voyage were defrayed by loans from Wordsworth and Sir George Beaumont.

Change of air and scene must have ameliorated Coleridge's health and habits, for soon after his arrival he is found discharging the duties of private secretary to the Governor of Malta, Sir Alexander Ball, and afterwards public secretary *ad interim*, not leaving the island, except for a short visit to Sicily, until the arrival of his successor in September, 1805. Little correspondence of this period is extant, and he probably composed nothing but official papers and memoranda on political affairs.

On leaving Malta he went to Naples, and we can confirm Mr. Campbell's opinion, that he remained until nearly the time of the French occupation (February, 1806), by an unpublished anecdote. When the invaders were expected

Coleridge called upon Mr. George Noble, an English merchant in the city, and vehemently declared that the invasion ought to be resisted at all hazards. Suiting the action to the word, he snatched up a lance, and proceeded to perform the military exercise with such energy and awkwardness that Mr. Noble was heartily relieved when the weapon ran into and remained infixed within a wooden pillar supporting the ceiling. Coleridge extricated his own person, however, in time to reach the nominally independent and neutral city of Rome, where he made friends with two great Germans, Wilhelm von Humboldt, to whom he repeated Wordsworth's "Ode on Immortality," and Ludwig Tieck, with whom he afterwards renewed acquaintance in England; also with the American painter Allston.

No spot in the world could have suited him better, but want of means constrained his departure; that Napoleon sought to have him arrested is hardly more credible than his other assertion that fear of a French cruiser made him cast valuable manuscripts into the sea. Embarking on an American ship, he reached Portsmouth in August, 1806, broken down by remorse for wasted opportunities and dread of the dismal prospect before him. He took refuge in London, but strong pressure from Wordsworth eventually brought him to the Lakes. "Never," wrote Dorothy Wordsworth, "did I experience such a shock as on seeing him," and she adds, "My wishes are that he may have strength of mind to abide by his resolution of separating from Mrs.

C." He rallied, however, sufficiently to compose, at Sir George Beaumont's seat at Coleorton, the noble lines upon hearing Wordsworth recite his "Prelude"; and his domestic dissatisfaction and yearning for sympathy prompted, in the course of 1807, two of the most beautiful of his lyrics, "Some Recollections of Love," and "The Day Dream," inscribed to "Asra," *i.e.* Mrs. Wordsworth's sister, Sara Hutchinson. Singularly enough, although his wife and he had arranged a separation which completed his estrangement from his father's family, he took her with him to Somersetshire, where much of the year was spent under the aegis of Poole, the friend of both. The summer was also made memorable by his first acquaintance with the youthful De Quincey, who was so impressed by the spectacle of "majestic power, already besieged by decay," as to send him anonymously three hundred pounds as "an unconditional loan." A noble action! if De Quincey had not afterwards marred it by charges of plagiarism which hurt Coleridge less than himself. He was delicately generous in material things: but in the things of the spirit treated the objects of his regard as the bear treated the hermit.

In the early part of 1808 Coleridge was in London, lecturing successfully, though not with perfect regularity, on poetry, and writing for the "Edinburgh Review" an article on Clarkson and the abolition of the slave trade, which he accuses Jeffrey of garbling. Later in the year, after a visit to his own house, now permanently occupied

by the Southeys, he domesticated himself with the Wordsworths. "Coleridge and his wife are separated," wrote Dorothy, "and I hope they will both be the happier for it." He continued to pay his wife the Wedgwood annuity; if anything else was needed it was defrayed by Southey, whose hospitality also sheltered and supported Mrs. Coleridge's sister, the widow Lovell. He had a family of his own besides, and might well exclaim, "To think how many mouths I must feed out of one inkstand!" By and by half the annuity was withdrawn by the survivor of the brothers Wedgwood, just as the children were becoming expensive. But the unflinching Southey shouldered the new responsibility with a light heart. His conduct would have been a pattern of heroic virtue if he could have refrained from occasionally girding at Coleridge in language bordering upon rancour. Two infirmities blemished the otherwise almost peerless character of Southey, intolerance and self-righteousness.

Coleridge must have felt the humiliation bitterly, and would fain have eased Southey of his honourable burden: but, the annuity once assigned away, it was more than he could do to support himself. The effort he notwithstanding made against his besetting indolence and self-indulgence commands sympathy and even admiration, ill-judged as it was, and from the first foredoomed to failure. This was his new periodical publication of essays, "The Friend." To have given this undertaking any chance of success, it should have been brought out in London

under the editor's personal supervision, but Coleridge took it into his head to print at Penrith, a place twenty-eight miles from his residence, and further separated by an almost inaccessible mountain. Between the delays occasioned by Coleridge's procrastination, partly, alas! the effect of opium, and those due to the exiguity of the resources of the Penrith printer, the first number, announced for January, 1809, was delayed until June, and the journal, though assisted by contributions from Wordsworth, flickered out in the following March, after twenty-seven numbers of most irregular issue.

Considering his moral and material difficulties, Coleridge had made a better fight than could have been expected, though he might have done nothing if Sara Hutchinson had not been willing to write to his dictation. The revised and extended edition which he subsequently published differs widely from the original. After its discontinuance he spent five months at Greta Hall with Southey and his own family, teaching his children, but otherwise inactive. He did not accuse himself of idleness, being always "willing to exert energy, only not in anything which the duty of the day demanded."

In October Coleridge sufficiently emerged from his lethargy to remove to London, but this judicious step brought a grief upon him to which, as he truly declared, "all the rest were fleabites." He was to have domesticated with Basil Montagu, but Wordsworth thought it his duty to warn Montagu that some of Coleridge's habits

might be inconvenient in a family, and Montagu repeated the confidential communication to Coleridge himself in a grossly exaggerated form. The anger and mortification of the sensitive poet may be imagined, but by far the worst part of the blow was the hand that dealt it. Had it been an enemy he could have borne it, but his companion, his guide, and his own familiar friend!

After a year and a half Wordsworth's disclaimers and Crabb Robinson's mediation healed the breach in a measure; and it might have been entirely closed had Wordsworth taken advantage of a beautiful letter of consolation addressed to him by Coleridge upon the death of one of his children in December, 1812. Unhappily he did not reply, some expressions had jarred upon his sensitiveness. The renewed estrangement lasted till 1815, and left painful traces in Coleridge's removal of Wordsworth's name from the verses he had composed upon hearing the recitation of "The Prelude," and in the tone, not the substance, of his generally excellent criticism of "The Excursion" in his "Biographia Literaria." It is not likely that Wordsworth ever quite forgave this criticism, but he had enough magnanimity to leave it unnoticed, and though he and Coleridge saw but little of each other in later life, there can be no question of the sincerity of his mourning for his old friend's death. One result of the estrangement was to render the Lake country impossible for Coleridge; he appeared there for a short time in the spring of 1812,

before the first reconciliation, but he did not see the Wordsworths, and he never came again.

It was a just remark of De Quincey's that Coleridge, with all his misadventures, was always provided with relays to take him along the journey of life. After his abrupt exodus from Montagu's household he took refuge at Hammersmith with the Morgans, a family to be ever held in honour for their kindness to him. There for five months he seems to have done little but "talk divinely," but, rallying his energies, became for some time a regular member of the staff of Stuart's evening paper, "The Courier"; and braced himself up to the delivery of three courses of lectures on poetry, the drama, and literature in general.

Notwithstanding his negligence in preparation, which amazed the Morgans, and once at least occasioned the substitution of a subject on which he could talk extempore for one which needed preparation, the lectures, so far as can be judged by the notes of hearers, seem to have been fully worthy of him. They were also fairly successful, and by making him personally known in intellectual circles probably did more for his fame than had been accomplished by his writings. In judging the attitude of his age towards him it must be remembered that his best poems had not yet been collected, and several, including "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan," not even printed. His notoriety, if not his permanent celebrity, was further extended by the successful performance in January, 1813, of his tragedy,

"Remorse," which he had written in his Stowey days, under the title "Osorio," and which now came upon the stage through the generous interposition of Byron. It ran for twenty nights; the representation brought him £400, and the publication something further.

Coleridge ought now to have been on the threshold of prosperity, but was in fact entering upon the most dismal period of his life. The cause was no doubt his relapse into the opium habit, which had been greatly mitigated by the firmness and kindness of the Morgans. But what was the cause of the relapse? Mr. Dykes Campbell is almost certainly right in imputing it to the agony of mind occasioned by his second rupture with Wordsworth. Whatever the reason, he did nothing until October, 1813, when he prevailed upon himself to go down to Bristol and deliver several courses of lectures, which, according to Cottle, were admirable, but, according to Coleridge himself, were unremunerative.

We afterwards find him at Ashley, near Bath, in the company of the Morgans, now reduced in circumstances; and at Calne, in Wiltshire, under the plea of consulting a local practitioner. Little trace remains of this gloomy period except letters of bitter self-accusation to his old Bristol friends, Cottle and Wade; and others to Stuart and other Londoners, full of magnificent literary promises which he took no steps to fulfil. The demarcations of truth and falsehood, never firmly traced in his mind, were becoming hopelessly confused; hazy intentions assumed with him the guise of

accomplished facts. He spoke of having by him a re-written version of Fletcher's "Beggar's Bush," to this time unseen by any mortal; he complained of having lost weeks over an abortive version of "Faust," through the iniquity of a publisher; his studies, if he made any, left no trace.

He did, however, under the kindly compulsion of Morgan, make a fair beginning with his "Biographia Literaria," and the encouragement and pecuniary aid of Byron brought him up to London at the beginning of 1816 with three acts of a new tragedy, "Zapolya." Shortly afterwards he took the step which saved him. Confiding to his medical adviser, Dr. Adams, the necessity under which he felt of being placed under the control of some one who would firmly bridle the opium habit, he was recommended as an inmate to Mr. Gillman, a surgeon at Highgate. Gillman was at first disinclined, but an hour of Coleridge's conversation converted him. Coleridge took up his residence at The Grove, and the opium habit, if it could not be wholly eradicated, was henceforth restrained within comparatively harmless limits. Here the age of prose begins for Coleridge; his pinions were no longer capable of lofty poetical flights, but his influence as a thinker dates from his eclipse as a poet.

Although, however, Coleridge had now in a measure attained the tranquillity for which he had sighed in one of his most beautiful poems, he could not address Hope and Fortune in the couplet cited by Gil Blas on his retirement into

private life.[1] One still had deceptions in store for him and the other wounds. To the former class of affliction belonged the disappointment of reasonable expectation when, immediately after his entrance into Gillman's house, "Christabel" was at last published, and when the "Biographia Literaria" succeeded in the following year. These works, now among the most prized in the language, were encountered by savage abuse in the "Edinburgh Review" and "Blackwood," disgraceful to the journals and the writers. If, as is probable, the Edinburgh article on "Christabel" proceeded from Hazlitt, it was an unpardonable sin against light, he knew infinitely better. The Blackwood reviewer of the "Biographia" may have designed to pay off Coleridge for a similar sin of his own, the assault on Maturin's "Bertram," which he had written or inspired in the "Courier," and repeated in the "Biographia," which did indeed scathe a bad play, but which charity herself can impute to nothing but envy of the inferior poet's success.

Coleridge was fitly punished by the refusal of the Drury Lane committee to accept his "Zapolya" as it stood, and by his own indolent omission to make the alterations which would have rendered it acceptable. It was indeed hard that the collection of his most inspired poems, under the title of "Sibylline Leaves," should first be defaced by execrable misprints, and then frustrated of its profits by the bankruptcy of the

[1] Inveni portum. Spes et Fortuna, valete.
Sat me lusistis, ludite nunc alios.

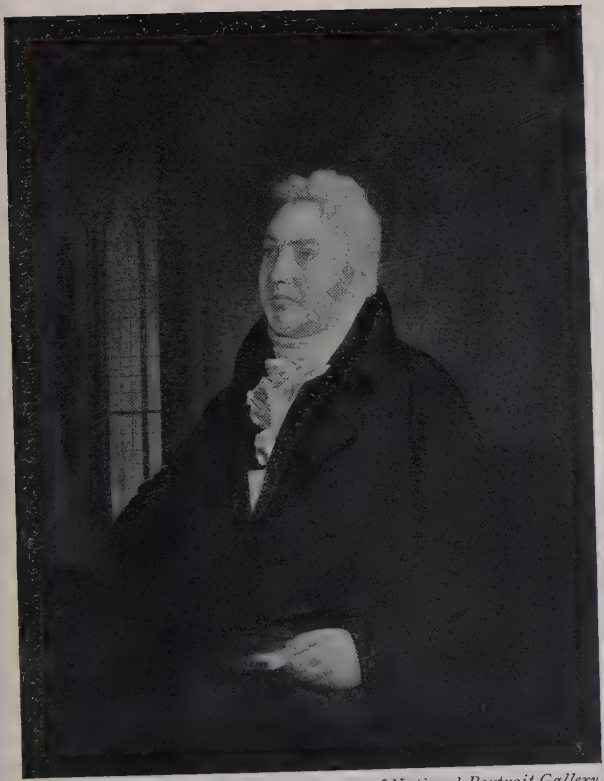
publisher; but he should have chosen his publisher better.

Another important undertaking which brought him but qualified satisfaction was his "Discourse on Method," written for the "Encyclopaedia Metropolitana," the plan for which had been furnished by him. The publishing committee disapproved; printed nevertheless, but in Coleridge's opinion "bedevilled" his production, the substance of which he incorporated in "The Friend." A much heavier blow descended in 1820, when his wonderful son Hartley, in many respects the miniature counterfeit of himself, lost by intemperance the Oxford fellowship he had gained by talent and industry. Coleridge bitterly reproached himself with having neglected to exert his moral influence on his son; it would have been scant comfort to tell him, as he might have been told with truth, that this influence, beneficial in many ways, would have counted for little in this. Coleridge's sorrow at this event, and his soreness at what he deemed the ingratitude and neglect of old friends (always excepting Lamb) are pathetically set forth in the active correspondence he carried on at this time with Thomas Alsop, a young and enthusiastic disciple who subsequently broke bounds.

The remaining external incidents of Coleridge's life are few and in general unimportant. Among the most agreeable were a tour of six weeks on the Rhine, undertaken with Wordsworth and his daughter Dora in 1828, evincing the restoration of much of the old cordiality;

and the bestowal upon him of a pension of a hundred guineas from the king's private purse in 1825, in company with the other nine fellows of the newly founded Royal Society of Literature, to which Basil Montagu, repentant for the injury he had done him, had procured his election. It has been said that George IV merely intended donations, and was aghast to find that he had rendered himself liable for annual subscriptions; but there has been too much detraction of a sovereign who, if he did not greatly adorn the throne in his own person, knew the lustre it was capable of receiving from acts of munificence, especially to illustrious subjects. The pension was revoked on William IV's accession, by reason of the comparative impecuniosity of that monarch. In 1828 the first collected edition of Coleridge's works was published; another followed in the succeeding year, and another five years afterwards. The few additions he made from time to time, up to about 1829, are not the least interesting of his writings. The best are quite brief, mere casual effusions, but exquisitely polished, and expressed with a *curiosa felicitas* that seems to exclude the idea of labour, although the case is really far otherwise. "Youth and Age," "All Nature seems at Work," and "Love, Hope, and Patience in Education" are examples.

Coleridge's main work in these latter years was, however, that of a writer and a discourser in prose, especially on philosophical and theological subjects. He had long ago qualified himself to influence the more enlightened among



Walker & Cockerell photo.] [*National Portrait Gallery.*

S. T. COLERIDGE.

By Washington Alston, A.R.A.

the supporters of ancient institutions by becoming a liberal Churchman and a liberal Tory, and although he found it difficult to speak with civility of Locke and Hume, he did not in general, like Southey, exasperate those with whom he had himself been accustomed to think. This activity in his new sphere, if less charming, was far more effective than of old. Its influence on many of the best minds of the age is summed up in Archdeacon Hare's proclamation of Coleridge as "the true sovereign of English thought." Its impress was not confined to avowed disciples like Hare, Kingsley, Maurice; partial dissentients like Irving, Newman, Arnold, Martineau, Stuart Mill, were more or less deeply affected by it.

The most important of Coleridge's theological and philosophical writings of this period are the "Aids to Reflection" (1825), the "Fragment on the Church" (1830), and the "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit," published posthumously in 1840. A copious treatise on Logic, long deemed mythical, actually exists in MS. in the British Museum. The others are all classical: it is nevertheless probable that the spell of Coleridge's conversation was more potent than his writings. For many years Highgate was the resort of eager and inquiring minds, and there, though without direct intention on the part of speaker or hearers, was fabricated much of the artillery which eventually shook, if it could not entirely overthrow, the utilitarian systems of Paley and Bentham. The character of Cole-

ridge's disquisitions, and his mental and physical attitude in general, are depicted with incomparable vividness, but in no amicable spirit, in Carlyle's "Life of Sterling." Every detail of the picture is probably correct, and the total impression is erroneous only because the balance between Coleridge's strength and his weakness has been inaccurately struck.

Coleridge died of a complication of ailments on July 25, 1834. His resources had latterly been clouded with embarrassment from the loss of his pension, a privation which Peel would assuredly have made good if Coleridge had lived eight months longer. It may also be hoped that his University, to which he had made an agreeable visit in 1833, would have seen the fitness of honouring herself in him, undutiful son as he had been to her. Apart from these considerations, it was time for him to go; the moral sweetness of his disposition remained unimpaired, but intellectually he was beginning to exhibit symptoms of peevishness and intolerance. He could have added nothing to his reputation; the great philosophical work would have remained unwritten, or if it had been written it could merely have taught his disciples the vanity of supposing that the keys of all the creeds hung at their master's girdle. His mission as a thinker (though he deemed otherwise) was not to impose a system of his own, but to permeate other men's systems, and this he achieved. His best poetry—"infinite riches in a little room," reminds us that Nature is commonly chary of the most exquisite

products; his moral history might have been designed to teach that the purest gold of head and heart needs the alloy of the merely self-regarding virtues. His intellectual failings were those of the myriad-minded man, and scarcely separable from that rare and marvellous character.

Coleridge's personal appearance was highly characteristic. He had very black hair until this became prematurely gray, a pallid complexion, which Wordsworth says looked as if it ought to be blooming, and the large light gray eyes which the same observer selects as the peculiar feature which made him "noticeable," and which Harriet Martineau, who saw him near his end, found "extremely prominent, and actually glittering" —like his own Ancient Mariner. His brow was less massive than might have been expected, the short nose wanted power, and the sensuous lips decision; but the mouth was that "of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming." His stature was medium, and his build somewhat corpulent until he wasted in old age. He was frequently painted, and the likenesses were usually considered good. Nearly all have been reproduced. They agree in depicting a singular alliance of listlessness and enthusiasm, as if

> "The dreaming clay
> Was lifted by the thing that dreamed below."

THE LITERARY HISTORY OF HIS WORKS.

TO the history of Coleridge's life succeeds the literary history of his works, including the circumstances which called them forth, their immediate effect, and the general estimate of them by posterity. They obviously fall into two great classes, poetical works and works in prose, which it will be convenient to consider separately, giving precedence to the former. These also may be divided into two sections, the strictly poetical and the dramatic.

Coleridge's poetry began as it continued, a strain of sentiment, affection and enthusiasm. The first lines of his preserved are the pretty verses, written at fourteen, to "Genevieve," a name to be immortalized by him in a much more important poem. The original Genevieve is said to have been the daughter of his school nurse. His first production of any consequence, the "Monody on Chatterton," written in 1790, and printed with an edition of Chatterton's works in 1794, is also highly characteristic. Had Chatterton possessed high moral as well as high poetical qualities, had he boldly come forward in his own character as the restorer of the spirit of the past in the language of the present, instead of stooping to fraud and the affectation of obsolete dic-

tion, he might have been the reviver of English poetry, and have numbered Wordsworth and Coleridge among his disciples. Coleridge's "Monody" is inspired by a dim perception of this fact, and perhaps by sympathy with one educated like himself on a charitable foundation. The style, however, is mainly that of Gray and Collins, the best lyrical models the eighteenth century could afford him: he had not yet found his way back to the Elizabethans.

There was a remarkable propriety in his thus commencing his poetical career with a poem so intimately concerned with Bristol, where his own early poems were (1796) to make their appearance under the aegis of that singular Maecenas, Cottle—the swan's egg hatched by the goose. Before this (1794) the sympathy, rather political than poetical, of another publisher, the sturdy reformer, Benjamin Flower, of Cambridge, had enabled him to publish the tragedy on the fall of Robespierre which he had written in conjunction with Southey, a mere improvise devoid of poetical worth. The "Poems on Various Subjects," published by Cottle in 1796, begin and end with remarkable work, for the concluding poem is "Religious Musings," which ought to have been in the van. The reason, no doubt, is the procrastination which kept Coleridge from completing the poem until the rest of the volume was printed. We have already spoken of this impressive piece of sonorous oratory as representing Coleridge's high-water mark while he was still in the trammels of the eighteenth century.

The pieces intervening between "Religious Musings" and the "Monody" are in general of small account, but suited the taste of the time better than more inspired strains would have done, and reached a second edition in 1797, remarkable for its temporary association with the inferior work of Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd, and for some additions, especially the fine "Ode to the Departing Year," which had already been published in pamphlet form. A third edition, weeded of Lamb's and Lloyd's contributions, and a few of Coleridge's own, was published in 1803. It was long before Coleridge again came before the world with a volume of poetry; but he had published a pamphlet in 1798 containing "Fears in Solitude," the "Ode to France," and "Frost at Midnight," three compositions unequivocally denoting the revolution Wordsworth had wrought in him, and the new stage of development on which he had entered. The same year witnessed another publication, epoch-making not only for him but for English poetry, the first edition of the "Lyrical Ballads," produced in conjunction with Wordsworth, to which, besides "The Nightingale," and a scene from the tragedy he was then writing, Coleridge contributed what is upon the whole perhaps his most remarkable production, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." The further consideration of this marvellous work is reserved for a special chapter. "The Nightingale" is hardly less remarkable, as at that time the most distinguished, almost the first, example of the deliverance of blank verse

from monotonous uniformity, and revival of the blended sweetness and grandeur of Shakespeare and Milton.

Coleridge's triumph is in our opinion less due to the subtlety of his art than to the infallible instinct conferred by the permeation of his entire being with poetical feeling. Inspiration will bring Art along with her, but Art will not engender Inspiration. The felicities of Coleridge arise mainly from the lyrical mood which, even more than Shakespeare and Milton, he imported into blank verse, and which shaped the rich variety of pause and intonation upon which its effect principally depends. No other poet has given his blank verse so much the effect of "wood notes wild," and in this he surpasses his heir and successor, Tennyson, greater as a conscious artist, less immediately inspired as a singer. "Love," or "Genevieve," probably written in 1799, was Coleridge's sole contribution to the second edition of "Lyrical Ballads" (1801). It is one of the most beautiful and best known of his lyrics, and the best representative of that large ingredient in his temperament and his poetry which cannot be better described than as innocent voluptuousness.[1]

[1] A beautiful cancelled stanza, discovered by Mr. Dykes Campbell, deserves insertion here, as it probably has not yet found its way into the editions. After "subdued and cherished long," add

> While Fancy, like the midnight torch
> That bends and rises in the wind,
> Lit up with wild and broken lights
> The tumult of her mind.

It was long before Coleridge attempted the collection of his works, and this indolence kept "Christabel" (1798-1800) and "Kubla Khan" from the public. Perhaps he amused himself with the idea of completing them: but to complete "Kubla Khan" would have been a sheer impossibility; and notwithstanding the extreme beauty of the passage on parted friendship, it is almost to be wished that he had not made the attempt with "Christabel." The "first fine careless rapture" is not to be "recaptured," the unearthly glamour has disappeared, and we have an excellent narrative poem in the manner of "The White Doe of Rylstone," with touches, indeed, such as no other poet could have given, but no longer "apparelled in the glory and freshness of a dream." Had he continued it in the manner he proposed, he must have descended still nearer to the level of the average metrical romancers. "Christabel," and "Kubla Khan," nevertheless, unpublished but much talked about and occasionally recited, contributed to give him that character of a seer or magus which impressed many who would not have been impressed by his writings. Although making no direct appeal to the public as a poet, he continued for several years to contribute poetry to "The Morning Post," where the burlesque "Devil's Thoughts," and the scarifying "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter," productions of high merit in their way, quite obscured such gems of poetry as "The Picture," and "Lines in the Album at Elbingerode."

Passing over Coleridge's dramatic works for the present, we find his next poetical publication to have been the little verse pamphlet comprising "Christabel," "Kubla Khan," and "The Pains of Sleep," published by Murray in 1816. He had, two years before, corresponded with Murray respecting a translation of "Faust," suggested by his steady friend Crabb Robinson. It is difficult to pronounce whether publisher or author was the more preposterous; Murray offering no more than a hundred pounds for such a work; Coleridge, while accepting the terms, professing himself competent to furnish the MS. complete within three months, with forty pages of critical disquisition to boot. The negotiation fell through, and Coleridge probably owed his second introduction to Murray to Byron, who, most unfortunately for him, had quitted England before it could take effect. Had Byron been on the spot, he would probably have induced Murray to have become the publisher of Coleridge's collected poems, and the shipwreck of "Sibylline Leaves" would have been spared him. Murray gave Coleridge seventy guineas for the copyright of "Christabel," and twenty pounds for the right of publishing the other two poems. Their success was not such as to encourage him to proceed further: reviewers were in general adverse, and the so-called second edition seems to have been "the old dog with a new collar," as the Spaniards say when they change their ministries.

Coleridge, who was just finishing the "Biographia Literaria," proposed to publish this and

the balance of his poetry as one work in three volumes. This strange idea was relinquished, and the poems appeared in one volume as "Sibylline Leaves," an ominous title! for the inscribed foliage of the Cumean Sibyl was not more wildly given to the winds. Coleridge had shown little discrimination in the choice of a publisher, who, unfortunate, dishonest, or both, speedily became bankrupt, and Coleridge says that he was obliged to buy up the copies of his own book to prevent their becoming waste paper, so severely had this treasury of exquisite poetry been ignored by the Aristarchuses and mauled by the Zoiluses of the day. The statement is confirmed by the number of copies extant with notes in Coleridge's handwriting, frequently complaining of the atrocious misprints, due, as he affirms, to the printer's neglect of his corrections. Of these, "Slush!" for "Hush!" is a peculiarly aggravating specimen.

The stream of Coleridge's fame continued to flow in subterranean channels until 1828, when at length a complete edition of his poetical and dramatic works appeared under the superintendence of Mr. Gillman and Mr. Jameson, the husband of the celebrated authoress. As Coleridge says that he had "given the poems, so far as this edition is concerned" to Mr. Gillman, it may have been undertaken to discharge a pecuniary liability, but the profits cannot have been considerable, if only three hundred copies were printed—"so Pickering says, and I have no right to suppose the contrary," says Coleridge.

The rapid sale indicated that Coleridge had at last come to his own, and a new edition was issued in the following year. The extensive differences between this and its predecessor seem to denote that it was revised by Coleridge himself, and notwithstanding some not unimportant additions and corrections due to the diligence or acumen of subsequent editors,[1] it remains the standard of the text, so far as it extends. The third complete edition, published during Coleridge's last sickness in 1834, was prepared for the press by his nephew, Henry Nelson Coleridge. It contains sixty-six poems not previously collected, forty-eight of which had not been printed. The most important complete editions since published are Pickering's (afterwards transferred to Macmillan), 4 vols., 1877, edited by R. H. Shepherd; George Bell's, 2 vols., 1885, edited by Thomas Ashe; and Macmillan's, 1893, edited by J. Dykes Campbell.

The first of Coleridge's dramatic works to be published was his translation of Schiller's "Wallenstein," made from an autograph manuscript of the author's, which occupied him from December, 1799, to April, 1800, when the last sheet of his "irksome, soul-wearing labour" was sent away. Having thus vilipended his own work, he had little right to complain of the hostility of

[1] Mr. Dykes Campbell, for example, by going to the German original, from which the misnamed "Catullian Hendecasyllables" were freely rendered, has purged the poem of two scandalous misprints, *placed* for *blest*, and *bleak* for *bleat*.

the critics, which nevertheless he did not fail to do in notes to "The Friend," and elsewhere. It was no doubt trying that the reviewers, unable to conceive that Schiller should have written, as they deemed, so poorly, should lay the blame on the translator, who was conscious of having, in fact, much improved upon his original. Considering not only the merit of his work, but the great popularity of the German drama in England at the period, the coldness of its reception is surprising. Coleridge laments the general application of the printed sheets to domestic purposes, and when Carlyle was writing upon Schiller in 1824, he was unable to find a copy. Kean was at this very period negotiating for its production upon the stage, but nothing came of the proposal, and "Wallenstein" was never reprinted until its appearance in the "Poetical and Dramatic Works" of 1828. The author himself had meanwhile come to a juster view of his work, terming it in 1820 his "happiest attempt, made during the prime manhood of his intellect." The best judges had always thought so. Scott eulogised it in Guy Mannering; and when Shelley declared Coleridge the only man capable of translating "Faust," he must have based this judgment on his version of "Wallenstein."

Coleridge was not entirely inexperienced in dramatic composition when he began his translation. Much of the year 1797 had been occupied in the composition of a tragedy called "Osorio," commenced at the instigation of Sheridan. "I have no genius for tragedy," he

ruefully observed when the proposal came to him, nevertheless by the autumn of the year he was able to submit a tragedy to Sheridan, who *more suo* rejected the play and appropriated the manuscript. This escaped the burning of Drury Lane and is now in America, affording materials for comparison between the original "Osorio" and the altered "Remorse,"[1] which, as already stated, was performed at Drury Lane in 1813. With this object, Mr. Dykes Campbell has reprinted it in the appendix to his edition of Coleridge's poetical works. The history of Coleridge's other tragedy, "Zapolya," has been already related. But for the strange irresolution which kept him from adapting it for the stage it would probably have been as remunerative as "Remorse." Eleven hundred copies were sold out of an impression of two thousand. Both tragedies prove that Coleridge's distrust of his dramatic ability was no less well-founded than sincere, the melodramatic situations and unreal characters take no hold upon the reader, but every scene proclaims the poet.

We now have to consider the literary history of Coleridge's prose writings. Two observations present themselves at the threshold: that there is, perhaps, no other instance of an author whose actually accomplished work bears so infinite-

[1] Coleridge's motive for the otherwise infelicitous change of title was the discovery that a respectable family of the name of Osorio was actually then residing in London: he even altered the name of the principal character to "Ordonio."

simal a proportion to that which he merely projected: but, that on the other hand, few have exerted an influence apparently so disproportioned to the bulk of their writings. To be just to Coleridge we must remember that, except in poetry, he was by taste and temperament not so much an author as an orator, and that the conditions of his times and the need of subsistence alone forced him into authorship. In ancient days he would have done from the first what he did at last, rehearsed discourses to select audiences of disciples in the manner of Epictetus, and trusted to some Arrian to preserve them for posterity. His style has the merits and defects of *viva voce*, he often seems rather talking than writing. In this he resembles Emerson, whose essays generally pre-existed as lectures: but Emerson's sayings fall drop by drop, like rich balms from a wounded tree; while Coleridge would empty his cornucopia at once, if it could be emptied. Hence, perhaps, the most agreeable, and certainly not the least valuable, of his prose writings, are the notes preserved of his Table Talk, the imperfect reports of his lectures, and the copious marginal annotations on books, published after his death by his family. We shall return to these, but for a general survey of the subject the chronological is the most convenient order.

Coleridge commenced the practice of prose literature as a political pamphleteer and journalist, and remained frequently though fitfully active as a journalist for about a quarter of a century.

His own journal, "The Watchman," expired of inanition at an early age, though Coleridge might at that time have been relied upon to go on writing if the subscribers would have gone on paying. The political pamphlets of the early Bristol period also proved ineffective: but as a journalist under editorial supervision, a contributor to the "Morning Post and Courier," Coleridge, though he greatly overestimated his services, was certainly efficient and influential. It was therefore natural that his family should wish to insure these fugitive essays against the oblivion that awaits uncollected papers, and they were encouraged by the opinion of De Quincey, who perhaps remembered that he had himself buried good writing in a Westmorland newspaper, that whereas "worlds of fine thinking lie buried in that vast abyss," the periodical political press, "nowhere, throughout its shoreless magazines of wealth, does there lie such a bed of pearls, confounded with the rubbish and *purgamenta* of ages, as in the political papers of Coleridge." The survivors acted on the hint, and assuredly did well to bring together in manageable compass for easy reference what otherwise would have drifted upon the "unfathomable sea, whose waves are years," till it had sunk to the bottom.

But none of Coleridge's writings have been less spoken of, or less frequently referred to, than those comprised in Sara Coleridge's elegant three volume collection of her father's work as pamphleteer and journalist. He evidently did not possess the gift possessed by so many political

writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of investing temporary topics with abiding interest, which does not always depend upon the importance of the topic. Yet alike from their substantial value and the neglect into which they have fallen, Coleridge's stores are good to steal from, and no doubt are occasionally explored for this purpose. "He put," says Sir Leslie Stephen, expanding a dictum of Stuart Mill, "a new spirit with the old conservatism by his attempt in his political writings to find a new basis for doctrines previously supported by sheer prejudice." This denotes an influence which might endure long after an author's very name was forgotten.

The titles of the books which Coleridge thought he intended to write up to 1809 would make a long catalogue, but nothing tangible occurs until the appearance of "The Friend" in 1809. The difficulties which beset this publication have been narrated already: even had it been brought out in a rational manner it is not so likely that sufficient subscribers could long have been found to support a periodical of such seriousness that Wordsworth's "Essay on Epitaphs" was inserted as an enlivening contribution. "Thought and attention," moralized Coleridge, "are very different things. I never expected the former from the readers of 'The Friend.' I did expect the latter, and was disappointed." But if ill adapted for periodical reading, the book is none the less a book for the library, to be kept and consulted with the certainty of finding ere long some passage of true eloquence, some pregnant principle

in morals or politics, or some striking application of history.

Passing over the two "Lay Sermons" (1816 and 1817), with the citation of Mill's remark that in them Coleridge has done his best to establish principles involved in English opinions and institutions, we come to the "Biographia Literaria" (1817), perhaps the first in dignity, though hardly the most influential of Coleridge's prose writings. The strictly autobiographical portion, though agreeable, is desultory and reticent, which may be excused in consideration of the fact that Coleridge was largely writing of living persons, but would probably have existed to the same degree under any circumstances. The circumstance, however, that he is recording opinions rather than incidents, conduces to the free expression of his views on subjects which interested him. The criticism in the first volume is mainly philosophical, and Descartes, Hume, Hobbes, and Spinoza receive especial attention. Wordsworth is the principal figure of the second volume, and Coleridge performs a service essential to Wordsworth's fame by abandoning his theory of poetic diction, and showing that he had not adhered to it in practice. He does not entirely conceal his disappointment with "The Excursion," and on the whole Wordsworth's pride must have received several rubs, but he behaved with magnanimity. The treatment of him would not have been so ample but for the necessity of filling out the volume, a base need not unknown even to the dignity of Goethe. Valuable as are

Coleridge's remarks on Wordsworth, the most valuable part of his essay is his masterly treatment of the relation of imagination to fancy.

This was the lecturing period of Coleridge's life, but as none of his discourses were published by himself it may be best to defer the consideration of the precious but too scanty morsels gleaned by others until we arrive at his posthumous "Literary Remains." His next complete work (1818) was the "Essay on Method" prefixed to the "Encyclopaedia Metropolitana," an undertaking for which Coleridge himself had given the plan, in which universal knowledge was to be conveyed by treatises instead of by articles. The preliminary discourse contains valuable instruction to the individual student for the independent prosecution of his studies, but fails in justifying the plan of the "Encyclopaedia Metropolitana." The Reason which prefers the classified encyclopaedia to the alphabetical is not the practical Reason.

For some years following, Coleridge, though no longer enchained by opium, was inactive as a man of letters, unless indeed he was fruitlessly busy with the huge manuscript on Logic already mentioned, which, unlike so many of the works in which he professed himself employed, actually did exist, but has hitherto existed to no purpose. This interval of apparent torpor affords a convenient opportunity for the remark that Coleridge's periods of inactivity were not always periods of idleness. His writings reveal an amount of erudition which could only have been

acquired by enormous reading, and though he is no doubt highly censurable for the breach of engagements and the neglect of duties, his time would not always have been ill-spent, had it been his own to spend. After one of the least satisfactory portions of his life, the apparently wasted hours preceding the issue of "The Friend," it comes to light that he has been learning Spanish.

After years of silence, he suddenly comes forward with the most popular and influential of his prose works, a book so seasonable that its publication might seem prompted by the nicest observation of the times, though no doubt in fact an unconscious inspiration of the "Zeitgeist." This was "Aids to Reflection, or Hints in the Formation of a Manly Character," a little volume at first but coldly received, but which soon proved itself addressed not to the general public, but to the young men between twenty and thirty upon whose thoughts and views the destiny of State and Church has been deemed to depend. One by one these shapers of the future came forward declaring that they owed their very selves to it: chiefly, indeed, from Cambridge, for the rival University was fermenting with a different set of influences.

The Oxford and the Cambridge movement, however, concurred in virtually proclaiming the old Anglicanism effete: something deeper and more spiritual was required, and this for a time Coleridge seemed able to give. As we now look back upon his work it seems too thoroughly steeped in old-fashioned divinity of the seven-

teenth century to meet the needs of the nineteenth, and in fact editions have become infrequent, though one is announced as we write. Its work is done, but it remains a significant memorial of a period which, beginning as an age of revival, disclosed itself as an age of transition.

Coleridge appeared yet again as a breaker-up of stereotyped formulae in two remarkable little books, the tract on the "Constitution of Church and State" (1830, but drafted some years earlier), and the "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit," not published till 1840. The Church of which Coleridge writes is not the Church of England, but a "clerisy" consisting of all learned and ingenious men sufficiently concerned with instruction, whether as authors, teachers, or practitioners of the arts and sciences, to be regarded as apostles of culture. "Neither Christianity nor, *a fortiori*, any particular scheme of theology supposed to be deduced from it, forms any essential point of the being of a national Church." Nevertheless the Church of England represents this clerisy on historical grounds, because, when the clerisy originated in ages of darkness the great majority of its members were necessarily clergymen. This would hardly be conceded in many quarters, but so wide a conception of the functions and claims of a Church must have exerted a liberalizing effect wherever it could find its way. The "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit" are made in seven letters left in MS. at his death, and which his executors seem to have hesitated to publish, and not without reason at a period when belief in the verbal

inspiration of the Scriptures was deemed essential to orthodoxy. At the present day their publication would pass almost unnoticed. They raise and negatively resolve the question, "Is it necessary or expedient to insist on the belief of the divine origin and authority of the canonical books as the condition or first principle of Christian faith?"

One more posthumous publication remains to be mentioned, the "Hints towards a more Comprehensive Theory of Life" (1848), interesting as having been originally intended to form a chapter in a medical work projected by Gillman, and as containing remarkable fore-shadowings of the theory of evolution, not however to be put to Coleridge's credit, as they are mainly derived from Schelling.

We now come to that extensive division of Coleridge's works, the posthumous publications of imperfect MSS. or mere memoranda made by the piety of his descendants. The most important are those comprised in the portion of the four volumes of "Literary Remains," published by Henry Nelson Coleridge from 1836 to 1839, which deal with literary criticism. Coleridge is undoubtedly the greatest critic that Britain has yet produced, not as a scholiast, but in the far higher capacity of a man of insight. He is naturally most penetrating in proportion to his sympathy with his author; he is frequently unjust to the writers of the eighteenth century, but many a neglected divine or novelist of the preceding age owes the revival of his reputation to him, and in treat-

ing of Shakespeare he set the sun in heaven. It is true that Lessing and Goethe had already done the same for Germany; but, although they may have been the first to awaken Coleridge to the perception of Shakespeare's transcendent greatness, his method and his remarks are entirely his own. "All," he says, "tending to prove that Shakespeare's judgment was, if possible, still more wonderful than his genius, or rather, that the contradistinction itself between judgement and genius rested on an utterly false theory." The depth of the latter remark, going so far below the particular question which calls it forth, is an excellent example of the generally penetrative and illuminative quality of Coleridge's criticism.

It is only to be lamented that here as elsewhere the curse of fragmentariness clings to him, and that the lectures wherein, except in the "Biographia Literaria," his literary judgements were principally delivered, were in general neither written down by himself nor reported with any approach to verbal accuracy. The late Mr. Thomas Ashe has performed the acceptable service of bringing them together as far as possible, and Coleridgeana are slowly accumulating from a variety of quarters which must one day be collected, classified, and published in book form. It is to be regretted that Coleridge (certainly not from want of scholarship, his occasional remarks are most valuable) did so little for the aesthetic criticism of classical literature; and that, while justly complaining of the lukewarmness of Wordsworth and Southey in vindicating

him against detraction, he did not set them the example by rectifying the public judgement of Shelley and Keats.

Another description of Coleridge's posthumous work was much less satisfactory than the critical, the philosophical. He had, as Mr. Traill expresses it, "given an undertaking to demolish the system of Locke and his successors, and to erect German transcendentalism on the ruins," and seems to have actually persuaded himself that a volume of his great work was in the hands of his disciple and executor, Mr. Joseph Henry Green, eminent as a surgeon. On coming into possession, Green, "running a mile that he might leap a yard," "undertook a vast course of reading, revived his knowledge of Greek, learned Hebrew, and made some progress in Sanscrit." Unfortunately, when Coleridge said that a volume of his work was ready, he meant or ought to have meant a chapter. Twenty-nine years were too few for Green to finish the work, and when, two years after his death, "Spiritual Philosophy, founded on the teaching of S. T. Coleridge," was brought out it fell dead. Coleridge remains a leaven, a ferment, an important ingredient in English philosophical thought, but neither he nor his pupil was capable of constructing a system.

Far more popular and really efficient were Coleridge's annotations on the margins of books, a method of conveying his thoughts most congenial to him. There is profound truth in Plato's allegory of the hermaphroditism of the human soul; every spirit has its masculine and its femi-

nine side; its creative and its receptive capacity, though one may be largely in excess of the other. In Coleridge the receptive element preponderated, his faculties were easily provoked to activity by the remark, sympathetic or antagonistic, of another, and his response was commonly made in writing in the closest local proximity to the observation which had called it forth. Volumes of his marginalia have been published since his death, and material for more remains uncollected.

A similar instrumentality produced his delightful and instructive "Table Talk," when his nephew Henry, who prefaces his memoranda by a charming portrait of the eloquent old man, led him on to talk on high themes, and noted down the pith of his discourse. There are frequent indications of prejudice and narrow-mindedness, and the general tone of despondency as to public affairs now seems unmanly and unreasonable; it must be remembered, however, that the period was in general one of fierce political agitation, that the results of the accession of an exemplary Queen were not foreseen, and that the strength of the conservative elements in English society were underestimated by all parties. Lastly, Mr. Ernest Coleridge has drawn from his grandfather's note-book a delightful volume of miscellaneous observations and reflections which he has entitled "Anima Poetae" (1895). Every side of Coleridge's intellect is here illustrated, and in particular that gift of minute observation which, as he seldom cared to exert it, many have refused

to him. How many would have made such a remark as this?

> The mahogany tables, all, but especially the large dining-table, marked with the segments of circles (deep, according to the passion of the dice-box plunger), chiefly half-circles. O, the anger and spite with which many have been thrown! It is truly a written history of the fiendish passion of gambling. Oct. 12th, 1806, Newmarket.

What was Coleridge doing at Newmarket?

One department of the intellectual activity of this wonderful man still remains for brief notice, his correspondence. With his extensive acquaintance, his communicative disposition, and his continued necessities, this could not be other than extensive. Mr. Ernest Coleridge has published letters in two handsome volumes, and these do not include the letters to Alsop, to Holcroft, to Godwin, and to many other important correspondents. Coleridge does not stand in the first rank of letter writers. When describing scenes or incidents he is admirable, but his favourite topic is himself, and upon this he usually becomes tortuous and verbose. The psychological interest, nevertheless, frequently atones for this defect, and the constant references to the distinguished members of his circle render his correspondence important for the literary chronicle of his time. A complete collection would form not the least welcome portion of the complete edition of his writings which has never yet been achieved, but which, it may be hoped, will one day crown their literary history.

CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF HIS WRITINGS

IN treating of Coleridge's style and the characteristics of his enduring works, it may be necessary to begin by reminding the reader that he claims distinction as a prose writer no less than as a poet. Enough has been said in our previous chapter to render it evident that, considering him simply as a man of letters, we regard his place in the latter of these capacities as greatly the higher. This judgement bears no reference to the value and abiding influence of the portion of his work which he has expressed in prose, but simply to its desert as literature. The ancient hero's chariot was drawn by four steeds, two of ethereal and immortal birth, two earthly and subject to mortality. All performed their office equally well, but the time came when the terrestrial pair could work no more, while the celestial flourished still in immortal youth.

So it is with Coleridge, his poetry, or more accurately speaking that portion of his poetry which was the offspring of true inspiration, survives and ever will survive in perennial bloom; the thoughts which he expressed in prose, with an important exception presently to be noticed, may

be aptly compared to rain, which, when it has fulfilled its office by penetrating and vivifying the dense mass upon which it has fallen, remains visible only in its results. So it is with the bulk of Coleridge's prose writings. They do not attain the level of style requisite for their preservation on purely literary grounds, nor are any of them so memorable and epoch-making as to be read in the same spirit and from the same motives as one still reads the tracts of Luther or the letters of Cromwell. Their immortality is not in themselves but in their effects, in the knowledge that every man of Anglo-Saxon race who speculates on morals or metaphysics, whether agreeing with Coleridge or differing from him, writes and thinks otherwise than he would have done if Coleridge had never written. The stone he cast into the waters has disappeared, but the circles that attest its weight and the force of its impact continue to widen.

There is, notwithstanding, as we have intimated, one class of Coleridge's prose writings which retains an interest not dependent upon excellence of style or depth of ideas, but of all interests the most vital, human interest. This class is the autobiographical, considerably more extensive than appears at first sight. It includes not merely his professional autobiography, the "Biographia Literaria," but a most extensive correspondence, constant references to himself in the notes and introductions to his writings, the numerous memoranda from his note books, mostly glimpses of a spiritual autobiography, and

the specimens of his Table Talk, which frequently convey his most deeply felt opinions, and in which we seem actually listening to the "old man eloquent." Nay, his very copious marginal notes on books may be included in this category, for these have all the tone and air of deliverances *viva voce*. All literature of this class will continue to hold its place as long as Coleridge continues to rank as a great poet and a fascinating study in psychology; as, nevertheless, its attractiveness is in no respect dependent upon style, we can give it no special consideration here, and must defer it until we come to weigh Coleridge's general merits and defects as a prose writer. We now turn to the one portion of his varied work which but rarely depends for its greatness either upon the value of the ideas communicated or upon the personal charm of the author, the really inspired portion of his poetry.

A sharp distinction must be drawn between two classes of Coleridge's poetical work, that in which he writes as a poet of the eighteenth and that in which he appears as a poet of the nineteenth century. The chronological demarcation between these two ages of English poetry cannot of course be fixed by the artificial distinction of centuries, and may be most conveniently dated from the fall of the French monarchy in 1792, which is also the exact date of the return of the chief hierophant of the new era, William Wordsworth, from the Continent, pregnant with inspiration. He had scarcely set foot on English

ground when Coleridge is found discussing his early poems with his brother Christopher, and assuring the latter that William is held in high esteem by "a society at Exeter."

Although Coleridge's early verse shows evident traces of the period of its composition, he continued for several years to write substantially in the manner of the eighteenth century. He has himself penned a severe criticism of the portion of Southey's "Joan of Arc" which was contributed by him (1794), and though "Religious Musings" and the "Ode to the Departing Year" (1796) stand higher, they are still such poems as an Akenside might have produced under the stimulus of the new era in public affairs, without conscious departure from established poetical principles. In 1797 a complete change sets in. Coleridge is no longer merely a fine rhetorical writer in harmonious verse, but a singer whose song is the very quintessence of poetry.

There can be no doubt that the metamorphosis dates from his intimacy with William and Dorothy Wordsworth formed at Racedown in June of this year; a momentous incident in the history of English poetry; for although Coleridge would in all probability have found his way to the recesses of the temple without Wordsworth's aid, it is equally probable that this would not have happened until physical and spiritual trouble had disabled him from production upon any considerable scale. The "Ancient Mariner" was the first fruit of the new inspiration, which continues potently though inter-

mittingly active until 1802, when Coleridge himself sorrowfully announces its cessation in his "Ode on Dejection." Yet it revisits him occasionally until the end of his life, and never without leaving something exquisite behind it.

The battle-field between eighteenth and nineteenth century poetry may thus be surveyed in Coleridge alone, and no one with any feeling for poetry as something distinct from the mere exercise of the intellect in verse, can have any doubt as to the decision of the contest. The present writer and Mr. Stopford Brooke may claim to have (allowing for a few reservations due to special circumstances) segregated in their selections the divine part of Coleridge from the perishable, and those who wish to know him merely as a poet need go no further. The study of the man and the thinker is of course more extensive and difficult, and in its ultimate result less definite and incontestable.

Coleridge's performance as a poet may be regarded as an illustration of his own favourite maxim in philosophy, the distinction between the higher reason and the understanding. In his earlier works he writes from the understanding, directing very considerable powers, both of thought and expression, to the elaboration of some particular idea, upon the value of which, even more than of the poetry, the merit of the poem in general depends. In his later production the poetry alone is the motive of the poem; there may be and often is a weighty moral involved in it, but the poem does not exist for the

sake of the moral, the moral follows naturally from the poem. The duty of kindness towards the animal creation has seldom been more powerfully enforced than in "The Ancient Mariner," but only to a very slight extent by direct exhortation, and to judge by his remarks to Mrs. Barbauld, Coleridge would seem to have felt that even this was too much. In his unregenerate days he would have made his teaching the theme of a sermon, which doubtless would have been eloquence, but would hardly have been poetry.

The weighty moral of "Christabel"—that the devil cannot come into your house without your co-operation, but that if you do let him in, even in perfect innocence, you will hardly get rid of him—is so delicately conveyed that many readers never observe it:

> The lady sank, belike through pain,
> And Christabel with might and main
> Lifted her up, a weary weight,
> Over the threshold of the gate:
> Then the lady rose again,
> And moved, as she were not in pain.

But for Christabel's well-intentioned aid the witch could never have crossed the threshold, protected by a holy sign.

It might well be expected that this absence of insistence, this simple spontaneity of thought and imagery, would be accompanied by a corresponding clearness of style and buoyancy of versification. Such is indeed the fact. We know that Coleridge's poems were severely revised by him, and the comparison between the first and second

versions of "The Ancient Mariner" shows how greatly this was to their advantage. The circumstance would never have been inferred from their style in their ultimate forms. Everything seems a natural growth, and it is difficult to believe that anything differed from what it is. This indicates that the style must be one of great simplicity, for a manner more complex and elaborate would suggest at least the possibility of variation. In this respect Coleridge had a decided advantage over the other great poets of his time. Some of Shelley's lyrics are fully equal to Coleridge's in simplicity and grace, but Shelley could not write narrative with Coleridge's ease and buoyancy. Wordsworth is more simple still, but gives the impression of a poet striving after simplicity, as other poets have striven after ornament. Keats is a master in his own style, but his style is Corinthian.

Altogether, it may be affirmed that the characteristic beauties of almost any other poet are more easily imitated than the characteristic beauties of Coleridge, and perhaps this is the reason why his immediate influence has been small, and why he has founded no school as Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley have done. There is nothing sufficiently salient about him for imitation to lay hold of: he is pure gold, unfit for circulation for want of alloy. In one respect only a direct influence may be traceable, his blank verse idylls appear to be in some measure the prototypes of Tennyson's. Comparing these works simply as poetry, the palm

must be assigned to Coleridge, but Tennyson has greatly enlarged the scope of the idyll by combining it with narrative, which Coleridge does not attempt, though "The Picture" trembles on the brink of narrative, and "Love" would have been a narrative idyll if it had been composed in blank verse. But for the unhappy paralysis of his poetical faculty Coleridge might well have taken the short step which remained: but as matters stand, while it is certain that Tennyson could not have written "The Nightingale," it cannot be proved that Coleridge could have written "The Brook."

We now proceed to adduce a few specimens of Coleridge's composition in the classes of poetry where his fame stands highest, which may serve to illustrate his peculiar mastery. What a marvellously imaginative picture, though in few lines and simple language, is this in "Christabel," of the behaviour of the dying brands as the witch passes by!

> They pass the hall, that echoes still,
> Pass as lightly as you will.
> The brands were flat, the brands were dying,
> And in their own white ashes lying;
> But when the lady passed, there came
> A tongue of light, a fit of flame;
> And Christabel saw the lady's eye,
> And nothing else she saw thereby.

Next to Coleridge's power of imagination comes his power of description. Both are combined in an extraordinary degree in "The Ancient Mariner," but as that poem will form the subject of

our next chapter we select some stanzas from a later piece, where the imagination of the unseen is so blended with the description of the actual, or what might have been the actual, as to render the mere vision as manifest as the most realistic piece of painting from the life:

My eyes make pictures when they are shut:
I see a fountain, large and fair,
A willow and a ruined hut,
And thee and me and Mary there.
O Mary, make thy gentle lap our pillow!
Bend o'er us, like a bower, my beautiful green willow!

A wild rose roofs the ruined shed,
And that and summer well agree;
And lo! where Mary leans her head,
Two dear names carved upon one tree!
And Mary's tears, they are not tears of sorrow,
Our sister and our friend will both be here to-morrow.

'Twas day! but now few, large and bright,
The stars are round the crescent moon.
And now it is a dark warm night,
The balmiest of the month of June.
A glow-worm fallen, and on the marge remounting,
Shines, and its shadow shines, fit stars for our sweet fountain.

Nor is Coleridge less successful in simple description, with no infusion of imaginative yearning. The following lines are from the commencement of "The Nightingale":

No cloud, no relique of the sunken day
Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip
Of sullen light, no obscure trembling hues.
Come, we will rest on this old mossy bridge.
You see the glimmer of the stream beneath,

But hear no murmuring; it flows silently
O'er its soft bed of verdure. All is still,
A balmy night! and though the stars be dim,
Yet let us think upon the vernal showers
That gladden the green earth, and we shall find
A pleasure in the dimness of the stars.

How the description is expanded and ennobled by the picture in the first three lines of what is not actually in sight, but was a few moments before the poet began his song! Words cannot better depict the most familiar aspect of the twilight that follows a fine day than "the long thin slip of sullen light."

Coleridge is equally happy in painting an interior. These lines are from "Frost at Midnight":

'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
This populous village! Sea and hill and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life
Inaudible as dreams! The thin blue flame
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
Only that film which fluttered on the grate
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.

Coleridge can, in fact, paint anything except the sordid details of the life of the needy, or scenes of violent passion and emotion. He could not have vied with the description of the apothecary's shop in "Romeo and Juliet," or with that of the storming of Constantinople in Shelley's "Hellas." The former theme would have repelled him, the latter he would have found unmanageable. Hence his range is considerably narrowed,

and the host of his admirers is restricted in proportion. But where neither realism nor sublimity is an indispensable condition of admiration his position is secure, and he has perhaps suffered less than any other great modern poet from the vicissitudes of taste.

Two of Coleridge's special claims to distinction as a poet should by no means be overlooked, the marvellous melody of his versification and his restoration of freedom and elasticity to English verse by showing that scansion depends upon the number of accents, not the number of syllables. This was no discovery of his, though he seems to have thought so, but it was the fact that in his day, in spite of the example of the greatest of all English metrists, Milton, uniformity in the number of syllables was deemed indispensable, to the cramping both of melody and expression. Coleridge proclaimed and exemplified the accentual principle in "Christabel," which begins:

> 'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,
> And the owls have awakened the crowing cock,
> Tu-whit! tu-whoo!
> And hark, again, the crowing cock,
> How drowsily it crew.

Here the number of syllables varies greatly, and yet each line is metrically of the same length, for each has four accents. The same freedom, elasticity and variety characterize Coleridge's compositions in all metres, accompanied by an exquisite simplicity which seems to exclude the idea of artifice, and a honeyed sweetness peculiar to himself. Compare the following lines in the

heroic couplet with the most liquid strains of other poets:

> Yet well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,
> Have traced the fount whence streams of nectar flow.
> Bloom! O ye amaranths, bloom for whom ye may,
> For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!
> With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll,
> And, would you learn the spells that drowse my soul,
> Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,
> And Hope without an object cannot live.

Coleridge's rank among the writers of prose is very much lower than his place as a poet: yet here, too, he manifested splendid powers. He may in this capacity be compared to a great diamond flawed, while other writers who, notwithstanding the inferiority of their genius, have taken a higher place, shine as small but well-cut brilliants. He spoke of Locke and Hume with foolish and arrogant contempt: yet they rank among British classics; while, if any prose work of his own has attained the like distinction, it is in virtue of the infusion of a personal element of autobiography. This comparative inefficiency is due in a measure to his discursiveness; he diffuses himself among a number of themes, and never concentrates himself for any great effort; nor can he, like Hume, deal exhaustively with a single subject in a narrow compass. He leaves every subject illuminated by the light of his genius, but the illumination has almost always been fitful and partial. Some of this comparative ineffectiveness is due in a measure to one of his finest qualities, the extraordinary comprehensive-

ness of his mind, and his ability to behold a subject from various and conflicting points of view. While this invests the operations of his intellect with a character of spaciousness and majesty, it abates their practical efficiency. He perceives so clearly all possible objections to what he is about to urge, and is so anxious to parry them beforehand, that he exhausts himself in parenthetic sentences, and seems to have fired away his ammunition before he is well engaged.

Yet he is not really an obscure or hazy writer; his style is less in need of clarity than of condensation. It also possesses in a high degree the merit of individuality, it is a true reflection of the character of the writer. Southey's prose is in many respects better, and may be recommended as a model, while Coleridge's, from the merely stylistic point of view, is more useful as a warning. But, unless the subject should serve as an indication, we can rarely tell whether any particular passage comes from Southey or not, but there is no possibility of mistaking Coleridge. His prose can hardly be called poetical, but it is usually above the ordinary level, and when treating a theme which moves him, and does not tempt him to wander among digressions or fence himself in with too many qualifications, he rises to high eloquence. The following noble passage from "The Friend" may serve as an illustration:

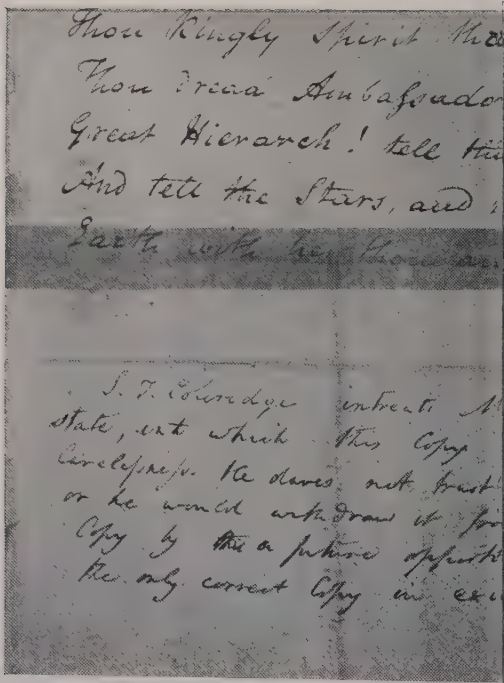
"It argues a narrow or corrupt nature to lose the general and lasting consequences of rare and virtuous energy in the brief accidents which accompanied its first movements—to set lightly by the emancipation of human

reason from a legion of devils in our complaints and lamentations over the loss of a herd of swine. The Cranmers, Hampdens, and Sidneys; the counsellors of our Elizabeth, and the friends of another great deliverer, the third William—is it in vain that these have been our countrymen? Are we not the heirs of their good deeds? And what are noble deeds but noble truths realized? As Protestants, as Englishmen, as the inheritors of so ample an estate of might and right, an estate so strongly fenced, so richly planted, by the sinewy arms and dauntless hearts of our forefathers, we of all others have good cause to trust in the truth, yea, to follow its pillar of fire through the darkness and the desert, even though its light should but suffice to make us certain of its own presence. If there be elsewhere men jealous of the light, who prophesy an excess of evil over good from its manifestation, we are entitled to ask them on what experience they ground their bodings. Our own country bears no traces, our own history contains no records to justify them. From the great eras of national illumination we date the commencement of our main natural advantages. The tangle of delusions, which stifled and distorted the growing tree, has been torn away; the parasite weeds, that fed on its very roots, have been plucked up with a salutary violence. To us there remain only quiet duties, the constant care, the gradual improvement, the cautious, unhazardous labours of the industrious though contented gardener, to prune, to engraft, and one by one to remove from its leaves and fresh shoots the slug and the caterpillar. But far be it from us to undervalue with light and senseless detraction the conscientious hardihood of our predecessors, or even to condemn in them that vehemence to which the blessings it won for us leave us now neither temptation nor pretext.

Excellent passages in a lighter strain, both critical and descriptive, might be selected from Coleridge's writings. As a critic he is absolutely supreme, no English critic has so nearly approached infallibility, except for the unfortunate extent to which he allowed his expressions of

opinion to be influenced by political and philosophical partialities. Even when most astray he is seldom wholly in the wrong; his estimate of Gibbon, for instance, is ludicrously inadequate, but the particular fault he stigmatizes really exists, the error lies in the disproportionate importance he attaches to it. This is merely to say that, like all critics of the first order, he shines more in affirmation than in negation. He is always weighty; but like Swedenborg's angel, when he affirms a truth his palm-branch blossoms in his hand. He may err upon an uncongenial theme: but give him Shakespeare, and it is hardly too much to say that Shakespeare hardly appears more conspicuously at the head of drama than Coleridge at the head of criticism.

As a philosopher, he mainly represents transcendental views against the philosophy of experience which, after all his efforts, continues and always will continue the characteristically national type of thought. In this, himself a pupil of Cambridge, he continued the tradition of the Cambridge Platonists of the seventeenth century, and a close parallel might be drawn between him and Plato: both beginning as poets and ending as philosophers; both putting forth schemes for ideal communities in their youth, and becoming votaries of legalism and precedent in old age; both sound political thinkers so long as they were content to speculate, but failures in practical life; both remarkable for the union of splendid imaginative power with acute logical faculty; as men of letters one attaining supreme excellence



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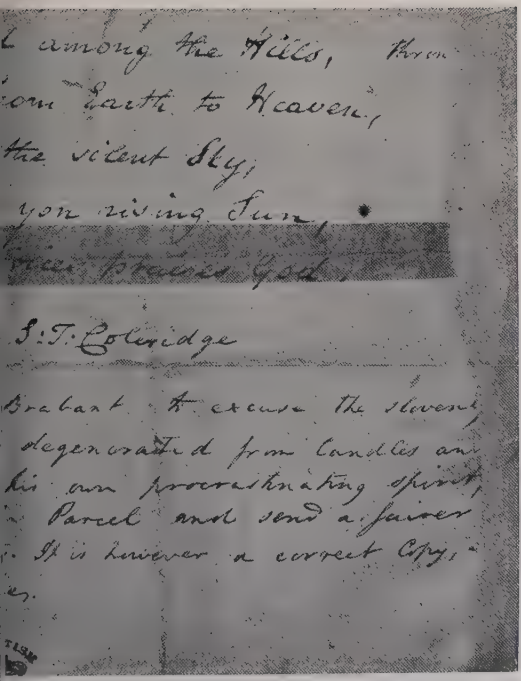
among the Hills, Bron
from Earth to Heaven,
the silent Sky,
yon rising Sun,
Praise God.
S. T. Coleridge
Brabant & excuse the slovenl
degenerated from Candles an
his own procrastinating spirit,
Parcel and send a fairer
It is however a correct Copy,
er.

[*British Museum.*

BEFORE SUNRISE IN THE VALE OF CHAMOUNY."

uracy from the poet.

in the verse and the other in the prose in which their respective counterparts were forbidden to excel. On the whole, Coleridge's greatness and weakness, as a thinker, could not be more vividly depicted than in the lines of Shelley, who never saw him:

> You will see Coleridge, he who sits obscure
> In the exceeding lustre and the pure
> Intense irradiation of a mind,
> Which, with its own internal lightning blind,
> Flags wearily through darkness and despair:
> A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,
> A hooded eagle among blinking owls.

"He struck out," says Sir Leslie Stephen, "illuminating sparks, but he never diffused any distinct or steady daylight."

THE "ANCIENT MARINER" AS AN EXEMPLAR OF COLERIDGE'S GENIUS

THERE is more difficulty in the case of Coleridge than in that of almost any other writer of his rank in selecting, as the plan of our work requires, the most typical and characteristic of his more important writings. Judged from the point of view of literature, which must be ours, his poetry takes precedence of his prose; but among all his poems there is not one of any considerable length, and the longest and most laboured, and the one written with the most deliberate consciousness of a mandate from heaven above and a message to men below ("Religious Musings") belongs to his immature period, both as poet and thinker. "Christabel" being unfinished, nothing with any pretension to poetical greatness, as determined by the scale of execution, remains except "The Ancient Mariner," and insignificant as is even its bulk in comparison with the productions on which his chief poetical contemporaries would be most willing to rest their fame, and utterly inadequate as it is to represent the general cast of so opulent and versatile an intelligence, it does happen to be in close alliance with some of those tendencies of his own

age with which Coleridge was most completely sympathetic.

These especial tendencies are the extension of the virtue of humanity so as to comprise not mankind only, but all sentient nature; and the reaction against what threatened to become the despotism of mere good sense devoid of any spiritual illumination, through what a distinguished critic has aptly termed the "renascence of wonder." The eighteenth century had been pre-eminently the age of philanthropy, more so than any epoch in history since the age of the Antonines. Man's duty to man had never been so emphatically set forth, and the pauper, the slave, the savage, the debtor, the convict even, were tasting, or were about to taste the fruits of this new and practical "enthusiasm of humanity."

But it had scarcely extended beyond mankind. It was something quite novel for a poet to take up an offence committed against an irrational creature as entailing a curse upon the perpetrator only to be eluded by severest penance. Such legends had existed before, but they had been related as picturesque tales; it was entirely a new departure to hold them up as embodiments of sound ethical rule. The inculcation of the duty of kindness to animals was a minor matter, but most momentous was the assumption upon which the poet's attitude was grounded, that sentient nature was not divided into the two sharply demarcated classes of beings rational, and beings irrational, but that one pervading life was common to all. Poetry is always in advance of Science.

The maxims of the evolutionary school of naturalists may be said to have been implicitly comprehended in this proposition, which Coleridge did not at the time openly enunciate as Goethe, Schiller, and other Germans had done and were doing,[1] but without which the teaching of the Ancient Mariner cannot be justified. To the poet, the slaughter of the unoffending albatross was a crime crying for vengeance: those who admitted no kinship between the slayer and his victim might from their point of view rationally inquire, "*Tant de bruit pour une omelette?*"

The renascence of wonder, to employ Mr. Watts-Dunton's appellation for what he justly considers the most striking and significant feature in the great romantic revival which has transformed literature, is proclaimed by this very appellation not to be the achievement of any one innovator, but a general reawakening of mankind to a perception that there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in Horatio's philosophy. For a long time the supernatural had been almost excluded from imaginative literature, save occasionally in the avowed imitation of the antique or exotic. Horace Walpole's "Castle of Otranto" (1764), though but half in earnest, marks an epoch as a serious endeavour to revive it, but the supernatural machinery is clearly introduced for the sake of

[1] On the contrary, he opposed Lord Erskine's bill for suppressing cruelty to animals on metaphysical grounds, thus establishing his thesis that the reason differs from the understanding.

literary effect. Whether it were, or were not, explained as an illusion, could make no difference to the story. Far otherwise is it with Shakespeare: if the ghost of Hamlet's father were not as real an existence as any of the mortal personages, the tragedy would become a farce. Coleridge identifies himself entirely with Shakespeare's position, and demands implicit trust in the veracity of the ancient man's narrative, thus rehabilitating the supernatural as no less legitimate for poetical treatment than the natural, provided that the poet complies with the indispensable preliminary condition of believing in it himself.

The poem was to have been jointly written by Wordsworth and Coleridge, but, save for a single stanza and a line here and there claimed by the former, belongs entirely to the latter so far as the actual composition is concerned. Wordsworth had nevertheless exerted great influence upon his companion by his suggestion of the incident of the killing of the albatross, without which the piece, originally founded upon a dream of a friend of Coleridge's, would have been a mere ballad of the wild and wonderful. This incident he derived from Shelvocke's "Voyage Round the World by way of the Great South Sea" (1726). And here a curious question arises. In Shelvocke's narrative the slaughter of the albatross does not appear as a piece of wanton cruelty, but as prompted by a not unnatural superstition. The bird was a *black* albatross. So long as it accompanied the ship bad weather prevailed, and

the seaman who shot it, a melancholy, hypochondriacal person, Shelvocke says, did so under the impression that it was an inauspicious creature, bringing ill luck. Did Coleridge know this? Wordsworth doubts whether he ever saw Shelvocke's narrative, but the circumstances may well have been related to him along with the other particulars, and his statement that the Ancient Mariner's companions, who had at first condemned, afterwards justified his conduct:

> 'Twas right, they averred, to slay the bird
> That brought the fog and mist—

affords some presumption that he did know it. If so, he showed admirable judgement in discarding a circumstance at first sight so picturesque, but which would have been ruinous to his moral, to which it is essential that no stain should sully the innocence of the victim, and that nothing but repentance should extenuate the fault of the Ancient Mariner.

In the ancient man Coleridge has added one to that gallery of typical figures created by poets and writers of imaginative prose who impersonate a particular class of men or a particular order of ideas. The Mariner represents the glamour attaching to the old man who, having from his youth sailed the seas, returns to spend his old age among his fellows on shore, and is naturally and justly regarded by them as the depositary of mysterious knowledge respecting a world unfamiliar to themselves. Such a personage must, from the nature of the case, be venerable, weather-

beaten, and more or less oracular; he may well be endowed with a glittering eye; possibly, though less probably, with an eloquent tongue also; and, dealing with a region unknown to his hearers, must feel himself entitled to claim from them "that suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith." Should any mysterious circumstance or dark rumour attach to his own character or history, he may himself become a legendary figure in his own lifetime. Lancelot Blackburne, having made a voyage to the West Indies in his youth, took the character of a buccaneer along with him to the archiepiscopal throne of York; and the veteran seaman, Owen Parfit, having voyaged on the West African coast and there had, as was not questioned, dealings in slaves and with the devil, left his neighbours in no doubt how to account for his disappearance when, one summer afternoon, paralyzed as he was and unable to move a step by himself, he vanished without leaving a trace behind him.

It is possible that some reminiscence of this inexplicable affair, which occurred in the adjacent county of Somersetshire a few years before Coleridge's birth, may have contributed something to his conception of the Mariner. However this may be, he has in this typical personage embodied whatever is most characteristic of the glamour of ocean,

> Its living sea by coasts uncurbed,
> Its depth, its mystery and its might,
> Its indignation if disturbed,
> The glittering peace of its delight.

An affinity may also be remarked between the Ancient Mariner and another legendary figure more ancient and more celebrated still, the Wandering Jew. Both are aged, both range the earth in expiation of a crime; both are always ready to narrate their histories, and, these once told, vanish without a trace. In dealing with the incidents of seafaring life and the portraiture of his principal character, Coleridge, while always correct in essentials, has avoided the realism of detail which, while it well becomes a novelist like Herman Melville or Joseph Conrad, whose object it is to make us live on shipboard, would not befit a poem which aims at being a selection of picturesque circumstances, and not an indiscriminate transcript of whatever an observing eye might find to note upon or around a vessel. When the "Ancient Mariner" was written, Coleridge had never been at sea. When at last he made a voyage, he discovered an inaccuracy in one of his most beautiful descriptions, and amended this in the next edition, but, to the contentment of the modern reader, beauty and melody eventually prevailed over strict accuracy, and the passage returned to its original form.[1]

[1] He had written "The furrow followed free," "but I had not been long on board a ship before I perceived that this was the image as seen by a spectator from the shore, or from another vessel. From the ship itself the water appears like a brook flowing off from the stern." He therefore substituted "The furrow *streamed off* free" in the edition of 1816, but the original reading was restored in the collected edition of his works in 1828.

Coleridge himself has given us an analysis of "The Ancient Mariner" in the shape of a marginal summary set against the text in the second edition (1800), and our object of providing the poem with a running commentary cannot be better accomplished than by a reprint of this exposition with a few inconsiderable omissions. This summary was an afterthought, the first edition having merely a brief prose argument. It was probably suggested by imputations of obscurity which the poem was far from deserving, but may well have seemed a necessary condescension to the dullness of average readers at a time when imaginative perception had fallen to so low an ebb. In our day this gloss is almost an annoyance when travelling in company with the verse, but may serve a useful purpose in the absence of the latter.

An ancient Mariner meeteth three gallants bidden to a wedding feast, and detaineth one.

The Wedding Guest is spell-bound by the eye of the old seafaring man, and constrained to hear his tale.

The Mariner tells him the ship sailed southward with a good wind and fair weather, until it reached the Line.

The ship driven by a storm toward the South Pole.

The land of ice, and of fearful sounds where no living thing was to be seen.

Till a great sea-bird, called the Albatross, came through the snow-fog, and was received with great joy and hospitality.

And lo! the Albatross proveth a bird of good omen, and followeth the ship as it returned northward through fog and floating ice.

The ancient Mariner inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen.

His shipmates cry out against him.

But when the fog cleared off they justify the same, and thus make themselves accomplices in the crime.

The fair breeze continues; the ship enters the Pacific Ocean, and sails northward, even till it reaches the Line.

The ship hath been suddenly becalmed, and the Albatross begins to be avenged.

A Spirit had followed them; one of the invisible inhabitants of this planet, neither departed souls nor angels.

The shipmates, in their sore distress, would fain throw the whole guilt on the ancient Mariner; in sign whereof they hang the dead sea-bird around his neck.

The ancient Mariner beholdeth a sign in the element afar off.

At its nearer approach, it seemeth him to be a ship; and at a dear ransom he freeth his speech from the bonds of thirst.

A flash of joy; and horror follows; for can it be a ship that comes onward without wind or tide?

It seemeth him but the skeleton of a ship; and its ribs are seen as bars on the face of the setting Sun.

The Spectre-Woman and her Death-mate, and no other on board the skeleton ship.

Death and Life-in-Death have diced for the ship's crew, and she winneth the ancient Mariner.

At the rising of the Moon, one after another, his shipmates drop down dead: but Life-in-Death begins her work upon the ancient Mariner.

The Wedding Guest feareth that a spirit is talking to him; but the ancient Mariner assureth him of his bodily life, and proceeded to relate his horrible penance.

By the light of the Moon he beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm, their beauty and their happiness.

He blesseth them in his heart; the spell begins to break.

By grace of the holy Mother, the ancient Mariner is refreshed with rain.

He heareth sounds, and seeth strange sights and commotions in the sky and the element.

The bodies of the ship's crew are inspired, and the ship moves on.

But not by the souls of the men, nor by daemons of

earth or middle air, but by a blessed troop of angelic spirits.

The lonesome Spirit from the South Pole carries on the ship as far as the Line in obedience to the angelic troop, but still requireth vengeance.

The Polar Spirit's fellow-daemons, the invisible inhabitants of the element, take part in his wrong; and two of them relate one to the other that penance long and heavy for the ancient Mariner hath been accorded to the Polar Spirit, who returneth southward.

The Mariner hath been cast into a trance; for the angelic power causeth the vessel to drive northward faster than human life could endure.

The supernatural motion is retarded; the Mariner awakes, and his penance begins anew.

The curse is finally expiated; and the ancient Mariner beholdeth his native country.

The angelic spirits leave the dead bodies, and appear in their own forms of light.

The Hermit of the Wood approacheth the ship with wonder.

The ship suddenly sinketh.

The ancient Mariner is saved in the Pilot's boat.

The ancient Mariner earnestly entreateth the Hermit to shrive him, and the penance of life falls on him.

And ever and anon throughout his future life an agony constraineth him to travel from land to land, and to teach by his own example reverence to all things that God hath made and loveth.

We thus learn from Coleridge himself what the moral of his poem was intended to be. It was a republication with vast extension of one of the most characteristic contributions of the eighteenth century to human progress. What the philanthropists of that century had eloquently enforced with respect to man's duty to man Coleridge extended to embrace all living beings, and this not upon the mere ground of the moral

beauty of compassion, which the eighteenth-century thinkers would have admitted equally with himself, but upon that of kinship, the entire sentient creation being regarded equally with mankind as an effluence of the Divine energy.[1] He thus introduced a mystical element unintelligible to merely rational thinkers. Mrs. Barbauld, who, reading the poem in the first edition, lacked the guidance of the running commentary subsequently added, deplored the absence of a moral, so entirely had what seems to us its obvious purport escaped her. Coleridge replied that there was too much moral. If he meant that this was unduly obtruded he did himself injustice; but if he had simply stated what the moral was, as he afterwards did in his marginal note, Mrs. Barbauld would probably have told him that this was too trivial; and he himself was far from apprehending at the time what momentous consequences were enfolded, not so much in his proposition itself, as in the grounds on which he rested it.

The other great distinction of "The Ancient Mariner," its character as almost the first authentic proclamation of "the renascence of wonder," is not of course insisted upon, or even clearly expressed in the poem itself. In this department it asserts nothing, it simply proves its case by its

[1] Shelley puts the pith of the whole matter into two lines and a half:

> If no bright bird, insect, or gentle beast
> I consciously have injured, but still loved
> And cherished these my *kindred.—Alastor.*

own existence. The instinct for the wonderful had indeed never died out of the soul of man, and, like a captive subsisting upon scraps and windfalls, had of late been nourished upon translations and imitations of Oriental tales, upon Percy ballads and Ossian; and on the Continent, though hardly in England, by that violent reaction against the unimaginative deadness of the time which produced the illuminism which in life embodied itself most conspicuously in Count Saint Germain and Cagliostro, and in literature in a powerful fiction, Schiller's "Ghost-seer." In England, however, "The Ancient Mariner" was perhaps the first publication which had not merely the characteristics that denoted the existence of a new movement, but the literary force that could urge it onward. Blake, indeed, had begun to sing, but had not succeeded in making himself audible. "Vathek," regarded as a tale of wonder, is a masterpiece, but it was originally written in French, and its spirit of mockery and persiflage is wholly that of a French *conte* of the eighteenth century.

Neither the idea of all-embracing humanity, nor the revival of the passion for the wild and wonderful, nevertheless, would preserve "The Ancient Mariner" from oblivion if it were not at the same time a work of exquisite poetry. On this point the *vox populi* and the *vox Dei* sound the same note. The delight of all imaginative readers since its first publication, it has always maintained its popularity with the generality, and is known to multitudes to whom the rest of Cole-

ridge is a sealed book. The cause is no doubt to be found in the deep human interest of the story, notwithstanding its wildness, and in the perfect simplicity of both style and thought. Shelley, Keats and Tennyson present formidable difficulties to the reader of inferior or even medium culture, but though the leisure of a deep thinker would not be misapplied in expounding "The Ancient Mariner," it has with perfect propriety and general acceptance been inserted into poetry books designed for children. Its poetical beauty, moreover, is even and continuous; it is indeed no exception to Johnson's just remark, that no poem of any length can be one entire diamond, but it is a chain of jewels so closely strung as to conceal the connecting links. In seeking to illustrate it by a succession of passages, we shall hardly find one which has not already gained the popular ear and become common property.

The western wave was all a-flame,
  The day was well nigh done:
Almost upon the western wave
  Rested the broad, bright sun;
When that strange shape drove suddenly
  Betwixt us and the sun.

And straight the sun was flecked with bars
  (Heaven's Mother send us grace!)
As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
  With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she nears and nears!
Are those her sails that glance in the sun,
Like restless gossamers?

Are those her ribs through which the sun
Did peer, as though a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that woman's mate?

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The night-mare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

The naked hulk alongside came,
And the twain were casting dice;
"The game is done! I've won, I've won!"
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

The sun's rim dips; the stars rush out;
At one stride comes the dark;
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre bark.

The moving moon went up the sky,
And no where did abide:
Softly was she going up,
And a star or two beside—

Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt alway,
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam, and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware!
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

But soon there breathed a wind on me,
Nor sound nor motion made;
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship
Yet she sailed softly too;
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze
On me alone it blew.

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
The lighthouse top I see?
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?
Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,
And I with sobs did pray—
"O let me be awake, my God!
Or let me sleep alway."

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
So smoothly was it strewn!
And on the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the moon.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,
That stands above the rock:
The moonlight steeped in silentness
The steady weathercock.

And the bay was white with silent light,
Till rising from the same,
Full many shapes that shadows were,
In crimson colours came.

It will be observed how completely Coleridge has solved two difficult problems, that of relating the most surprising events and embodying the most imaginative conceptions in language of transparent simplicity; and, conversely, of investing this familiar speech with a dignity becoming the grandeur of the tale and the half unearthly character of the narrator.

In diction and metre the "Ancient Mariner" is not only faultless but is far above the ordinary standard of good poetry. This was not the case with the first edition of 1798. Coleridge had begun to compose under the mistaken impression that it behoved him to be archaic, and the poem in its original shape is much infested with quaint and obsolete spellings and locutions. These disappeared in the second edition, which is also so greatly improved by revision throughout as to render the comparison of the two versions a most interesting study. This impeccability does not entirely extend to the conduct of the story. Al-

though we would on no account part with the description of the spectre ship with Death and Life-in-Death on board, it must be owned that this is a superfluity as regards the development of the narrative, and seems somewhat discordant with the general tone of the poem. It would have been in better keeping with that other typical figure of nautical legend, "The Flying Dutchman." It must be remembered in palliation that the apparent excrescence is closely related to the foundation of the poem, which originated in the dream of a friend of Coleridge's in which he saw a ship worked by dead men. The introduction of Death and his mate thus came naturally to Coleridge, though he has not succeeded in so interweaving it with his action as to make it appear indispensable.

A more serious defect is the violation of poetical justice in the penalties meted out to the mariner and his shipmates. The offenders whose crime is the mere approval of a bad action, perish; the actual perpetrator returns to his "own countree" and moralizes upon their doom. It can only be pleaded that the revivification of so many corpses would have bordered upon the ludicrous, and that Poetical Justice must give way when she comes into collision with Poetry herself.

Paris, in "Troilus and Cressida," reminds Diomed that chapmen "dispraise the thing that they desire to buy." It is not usual to find them dispraising the thing that they desire to sell. Wordsworth, nevertheless, when reprinting "The

Ancient Mariner" with Coleridge's alterations in the second edition of "Lyrical Ballads," added a note in which he disparaged the poem on several grounds, mostly imaginary or trivial. He adds, notwithstanding, that it has a value "not often possessed by better poems." Where he had found a better poem than "The Ancient Mariner" in its own class he does not tell us, nor can we conjecture. In thus depreciating Coleridge's work he was sawing off the branch upon which he himself was sitting. He might in a measure have claimed to be himself the author of "The Ancient Mariner," for although the poem lay outside his sphere, he by his new views and the contagion of his inspiration had raised Coleridge from the levels of Thomson and Akenside to the higher regions where alone such an achievement was possible. But Coleridge had amply repaid the obligation by providing the less exalted if infinitely significant performances of his friend with a prelude of such dignity that it might serve as a fit portal, not merely to them, but to the age of great poetry then commencing for Britain:

> The eastern gate
> Where the great sun begins his state.

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